JANET
HER WINTER IN QUEBEC

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_S0-CQR-646

JANET: HER WINTER IN QUEBEC

"Under the electric light above their heads she could see the color rushing into his cheeks." FRONTISPIECE. *See page* 256.

JANET: HER WINTER IN QUEBEC

BY

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

AUTHOR OF "TEDDY: HER BOOK," "PHEBE: HER PROFESSION," "NATHALIE'S CHUM," "BY THE GOOD SAINTE ANNE," "HEARTS AND CREEDS," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DRAWINGS BY ALICE BARBER STEPHENS

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1906

Copyright, 1906,
By Little, Brown, and Company.

All rights reserved.

Published September, 1906

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

ILLUSTRATIONS

"Under the electric light above their heads she could see the color rushing into his cheeks" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

"In spite of Janet's strictures, Rob did wipe the dishes" . . . . . *Page* 78

"Now that her chance was come, Janet seemed loath to speak" . . . . . " 200

"Then she stepped forward to the trail" . . " 276

Janet:
Her Winter in Quebec

CHAPTER ONE

"AFTER all, you know," Ronald Leslie observed thoughtfully; "it's the very same lesson I was trying to beat into another chap, all last summer."

Day unclasped her hands and, resting her elbow on her knees, buried her chin in her cupped palms.

"Sauce for the goose, I suppose," she said trenchantly; "and sauce for the gander." But there was no levity in her tone.

Unthinkingly, Ronald copied her pose. He was an abnormally tall young Canadian. She was a thin slip of an American girl, just fifteen years old and devoid of much beauty, save for a pair of brown eyes that danced and dreamed by turns.

"It's not just the same thing, though," Ronald pursued, as he sat with his eyes fixed on the bit of blue river which rested against the background of bluer hills. "That fellow — he was an American, too — was knocked out by his health.

Mine — " He fell silent, while the scarlet colour rolled up across his cheeks and dyed the roots of his hair.

The girl glanced swiftly at the band of black which barred the sleeve of his gray coat.

"No," she said. "It 's not the same thing at all."

Stooping, Ronald picked up a bit of stone and sent it flying through the air towards a distant boulder. When the click of rock striking against rock had cut across the silence, —

"No," he echoed; "it 's not the same thing, and yet it comes to it in the end. We both of us are kicking in harness. I was half through McGill. I was sure of a place in the pater's business, and — "

Day's eyes were all dreamy now. She spoke with the earnestness which came to her at times.

"And you were just ready to win your spurs, when you were thrown to the ground."

He nodded. Then he adopted her metaphor.

"And it 's not too easy to get another mount."

Undauntedly she faced him.

"Not easy; but you 'll do it."

"I wish I were sure of it."

"What difference, as long as I am ? " she retorted. "When you do succeed, not one of your friends will be gladder than I."

"If you know it."

"But I shall. It may be before we go away; there 's no telling how long we may have to stay here." Then silently she watched the cloud come back into the eyes of her companion. "I am quite rested," she said, as she rose. "Shall we go on?"

"Yes. It is time we were moving." He rose and stood towering above her in all his boyish strength. "You must think I am a good deal of a coward, Day. Still, I don't often flunk like this."

Impulsively she held out her hand. Not in vain had she watched him, during the past two weeks. In this foreign country, her girlish intuitions were bound to fail her in many ways; but not, she felt assured, in regard to Ronald Leslie.

"No matter," she said briefly. "It is part of my creed never to tell tales."

And Ronald, as he followed her up the hill, trusted her implicitly.

By the time they had scrambled to the top of the steep, grassy slope, even Day's agility was on the wane. Her step broke from Ronald's, lagged a little and came to a halt. Then she faced about sharply.

"You are so endlessly tall," she said, laughing. "Your elbow is just on a level with my shoulder, and your step matches your height. Do stop and inspect the view, while I get my breath."

Obediently he too faced about. Nevertheless, he mutinied.

"I have seen it all before."

Day had dropped to the turf at his feet, and was fanning her scarlet face with her hat.

"No matter. I have n't, and you can look for two. It is worth it, even if it 's not new to you."

With a sudden sweep of her arm, she pointed out across the foreground of low white buildings which bound the camp of Saint Joseph, to the distant purple gash where the Montmorency takes its leap to the river below. In the midst of the picture, the Isle of Orleans lay flaming in its October colours, bordered on either hand by the broad blue stripe of river. In the far background, the mountains rose in a wide semicircle, their sides changing back and forth from dusky purple to vivid red, as the shadows of the moving clouds gave place to dazzling sun. And ever and anon on the strong north wind, there came creeping up the slope to them a faint echo of the mighty din and clangour of the hammers which were beating ceaselessly in the graving dock, so far below.

When Day spoke again, it was abruptly and out of her own thoughts.

"Did you know that my brother was coming, next week?"

Ronald's eyes widened to show their whites. Then he curbed his wonder, if not his curiosity.

"I did n't know that — "

Still abruptly, Day capped his sentence for him.

"That I had a brother. Well, I have."

To Ronald's mind, it was not wholly obvious from the girl's tone what answer it was incumbent upon him to make. He took refuge in a monosyllable.

"Oh," he said. However, even as he spoke, he had an uncomfortable feeling that he had not risen to the emergency.

Day's hands dropped from her hair, and she looked up at her companion with merry eyes.

"Yes," she said, with a brevity which matched his own. Then once more she fell to smoothing her ruffled hair.

For a moment, Ronald eyed her despairingly. This was by no means the first time that Day had baffled his understanding.

"Well, what of it?" he demanded, after a pause.

Once more her hands dropped into her lap. She clasped them with a demureness which was only half genuine.

"Nothing; only I thought you would be interested."

Regardless of the fact that Day's tailor was such an artist as he could never aspire to employ, Ronald huddled her jacket into the curve of his left arm, and held out his right hand to the girl at his feet.

"Come," he said. "That is, if you 're rested."

Without troubling herself to rise, Day looked up into his face, took swift note of the spark in the brown eyes, of the quiver of the short upper lip. Then she smiled straight at his frowning brows.

"Don't be cross, there 's a good boy," she admonished him, with an accent half-teasing, half-maternal.

In spite of himself, he laughed.

"Then don't torment the life out of a chap," he responded, a little too fervently for her complete comfort.

Her glance dropped back to the river.

"Do I torment you, Ronald?" she asked quietly.

"Rather!"

"How?"

He was of English ancestry, and he cast about in his mind for a fitting answer to her nonchalant question.

"Oh, because — Why, by being chums one minute, and turning thorny the next."

She shook her head slowly.

"I suspect that 's the American of me," she answered, and a little sincere note crept into the levity of her tone. "You 'll get used to it in time."

"I 'm not so sure." Ronald's tone was still grave.

The laughter came back into her voice, the light into her eyes.

" Then you 'd rather I stayed thorny, all the time ? " she said interrogatively, as she scrambled to her feet and shook her skirt free from the blossoms she had been pulling to pieces.

For a moment, he looked down at her steadily. Then he asked, —

"But why not stay the other thing ? "

She shook her head, in wayward opposition to his mood.

"It would n't be me," she answered him. And Ronald was too busy in weighing and admitting the truth of her words to pay due heed to her calm regardlessness of grammar.

Had the truth been told, Day's occasional regardlessness of all things, from grammar to his boyish feelings, had been one of the most interesting facts of his recent experience. Unknown to himself, Day Argyle was proving the best tonic that Ronald Leslie could have had just then, and

Ronald Leslie's need of a tonic was greater than anyone but himself had been able to realize.

For nineteen years, Ronald Leslie had strolled along through life, his hands in his pockets, his chin in the air. Quite as a matter of course, he expected events to make way before him; and, as a rule, events justified his expectation. Then, of a sudden, the change came.

Only the second night after his return from the country and from the jolliest summer he had ever spent, only two nights before he was to return to Montreal for what he expected to be his gayest year of college life, Ronald Leslie had been called to the telephone. Two hours later, he had left his mother and his sister Janet sobbing in each other's arms and, going down to the library, he had seated himself in his father's chair and faced the future with dazed, but steady eyes. Four days later, as he came out from under the trees of Mount Hermon, the daze had left his eyes, but the steadiness remained. Under the yellow leaves that loitered as they fell, under the aged trees that had seen so many dropping tears, Ronald Leslie had left his father, resting from the professional strain that had snapped a life in two. And already Ronald had been told that his own time for passive grieving was ended. It was for him to stir himself and take active thought for the

morrow. From comparative luxury, he was dropped into something dangerously akin to poverty.

Two weeks later, Day had appeared. Even now, he had scarcely come to realize the nature of the chance which had brought this wide-awake, tempestuous American girl into his Canadian home and life. The Argyles were to spend the winter in Quebec. Mrs. Argyle's cousin had married Mrs. Leslie's sister-in-law. The rest of the chain of circumstance had forged its links quite naturally, down to the clasping of the two ends: Mrs. Argyle's need for a boarding-place for her family and Mrs. Leslie's equally imperative need for an enlargement of her income. There had been three Argyles, Day, her mother and her father, a well-known railway magnate whose winter in Canada was one of strenuous business which took him much from his temporary home. In her own city, Mrs. Argyle was accounted a woman of rare poise and charm; but, for Ronald, the situation had summed itself up in Day.

And yet, not even the fondest imagination could stretch itself to the point of calling Day Argyle charming. In person, she was not especially pretty; in character, her innate sweetness was often buried beneath a barrier of teasing thorns. She liked Ronald absolutely; from the hour of

their meeting, she showed a marked enjoyment of his society, completely ignoring his sister, when Ronald himself was in the room. Nevertheless, she treated his young ideals and his young dignity without one whit of reverence, mocked at him and teased him without cease, and only showed him her gentler side when it was plain to her that her mockery had gone too far, or when his downcast face, bearing witness to the anxiety he could not always down, touched her girlish pity and bade her hold out to him a helpful hand.

And Ronald accepted them all: mockery, teasing and gentleness, in all their swift alternations, accepted them without seeking to analyze his own enjoyment. Truth to tell, this irresponsible, merry girlhood was the best thing in the world for the young fellow, heartsick as he was with worry, and deadly weary with the routine of the office where a place had been made for him. The offer of the place had come to him on the day following his father's burial. The gratitude of his acceptance had been in no wise tempered by misgivings. In his eager, boylike optimism, he had not paused to realize how little his idle, happy-go-lucky youth had fitted him for the long, tedious hours of business life. Even if he had realized it, however, Ronald Leslie was not the one to flinch.

In future, his life was not for himself alone. It concerned itself with his mother and with Janet who was only fourteen and had her education all before her. Ronald Leslie was wholly loyal to his kin. Nevertheless, he was conscious that, coming home after a long day in the office, it was good to find his mother's tired face and Janet's black frock relieved by the bright, blithe carelessness of Day Argyle.

And now, two weeks after her coming into the home, he had bespoken Day's company for his Saturday half-holiday. He had asked Janet, too; but Janet had shaken her head. She had plans of her own; and as yet she and Day had not come upon any firm ground of sympathy. Day dismissed Janet without a thought. Janet thought much about Day, and the summing up of her thoughts had led to the belief that Day was rather arrogant and wholly critical. And Janet, albeit outwardly gentle, was not the girl to submit herself patiently to arrogant criticism. Rather than that, she would keep out of the way of this American stranger who had invaded her home and assailed her brother with no trace of the admiring respect with which Janet had been always wont to treat him.

And, meanwhile, Day and Ronald had crossed a wide strip of open pasture, skirted the edge of

a little lake and plunged into a belt of woodland where the shadows rested heavily over the rough, uneven turf. Less than half an hour later, they were sitting in the shade of Fort Number One, Ronald in an embrasure of the old gray wall, Day mounted upon an insecure flight of steps by which her companion had clambered to his present position.

"You 'd much better come up," Ronald urged hospitably, as he swung his heels to and fro against the masonry of his lofty perch.

"What 's the use? You just said you could n't get inside the fort, and I don't care to stop halfway," Day made disdainful answer.

"But you can see these two guns. You 've only to crawl in through this hole. It 's quite easy," he urged again.

Day sniffed in disapproval.

"Also quite dirty," she retorted.

Ronald made a vain endeavour to view the small of his own back.

"Am I so dusty as all that?"

"Not you. Dust does n't stick to you. If I were to go inside, though, I should be unfit for mortal eyes. Besides, as I say, what 's the use? I heard you clattering at a door close by, so you did n't go far. As for guns, I can see those on the Ramparts at any time."

Ronald surveyed her in mock meditation.

"I did n't suppose an American — "

Long since, he had learned Day's trick of capping his sentences for him. She did it now.

"Stopped at anything. Well, they do."

"At ? " he observed suggestively.

"At making geese of themselves," she replied, with sudden tartness. "I don't see the sense of wasting my efforts by crawling into a hole that goes nowhere. Nevertheless, I mean to see the inside of this fort."

Laughing, he held out his hand.

"No," she said, while, with a scramble and a leap, she landed on the ground beside the tottering old ladder which Ronald had dragged to the foot of the wall below the embrasure. "I intend to go inside. Meanwhile, I think I 'll upset the ladder, so you can't run away while I am exploring."

With a swift gesture, she suited the action to the word. With another swift gesture, Ronald turned about, hung for an instant by his hands, then dropped into the ditch at her side.

"Whither now ? " he queried calmly, as he patted his hands together to free them from the dust of his descent.

"To find a breach in the fortress," she answered

briefly; but her eyes showed her appreciation of his prompt reply to her challenge.

Twice they made circuit of the great stone fort, once in the ditch where they paused again and again to look down the muzzles of the old black guns that faced them from the depths of the embrasures, once on the crest of the glacis where they halted often to look out upon the noble view of mountain and river which spread itself before their eyes. As they ended their second circuit, Day gave a little laugh.

"Stratagem failing, I mean to try force," she said gayly, and, the next minute, she was running along the bridge that crossed the narrow ditch.

Day had had many a surprise in the course of her short life; none greater, however, than the one which met her when she laid her hand on the knob of a little door let into one of the panels of the great gate which faced the end of the bridge. The knob yielded to her touch, turned, the door swung open and, a moment later, American Day, camera in hand and Ronald at her heels, stood inside the sacred British precincts of Fort Number One.

For a second, a mysterious fear fell upon the girl; the place was so big, so warlike, so deserted. A dozen khaki coats would have broken the spell. The absolute desolation awed her and

made her afraid, and she turned to cast an appealing glance up at Ronald. The laugh on his lips partially reassured her.

"You have wrecked the local tradition," he said jovially. "It 's the first time an American ever broke into one of our forts."

At his voice, her buoyancy came back to her.

"The first; but not the last," she made crisp response.

"Mayhap. In the meantime, how do you like your new possession ? "

She glanced a little dubiously about the great enclosure which lay between the earth-capped wooden barracks and the gray stone wall.

"It looks rather lonely," she answered.

"All the better; else we might not be here. Come, shall we explore ? "

Again her nervous fear came back upon her.

"Do — do you think we 'd better ? "

"Surely. I was never here before; I 'm not likely to be here again. I certainly mean to make the most of my chance."

"But if we were caught trespassing ? "

"I 'll slay the guard, while you make a dash for the gate."

Her face fell.

"Then there is a guard ? "

"Somewhere. Not here, though." Then he

looked down at her a little intently. "Afraid?" he queried.

The colour came into her cheeks, and her shoulders straightened.

"No," she fibbed. "Come on." And, chin in air, she walked resolutely forward.

For a long half-hour, they wandered to and fro and up and down, now climbing up the smooth turf of the earthworks, now picking their way along the loose boards and over the crumbling plaster that littered the barrack floor, now creeping carefully along dark passages which led to a nowhere peopled only with slow-falling drops of water that clicked against sunken rocks in the heart of the thick blackness. Time-worn signs pointed to distant magazines numbered in great black letters. Tunnels led into the heart of the fort, branched and lost themselves in other tunnels which slowly led back to a faint gray reflection of the outer day. And everywhere was the same heavy stillness, broken only by the sound of their own voices, by the echo of their footfall on the ground.

And then, of a sudden, Day started back in alarm, as Ronald threw open a little door in the wall beside them.

"A man!" she cried. "It 's a man!"

And it was long before Ronald could coax her

to look in at the reflection of his own face, mirrored in the reflector of a lantern sunk in the wall. She laughed at last; but the laugh was unsteady, for the solitude of the place was fast destroying her level nerve.

She looked and laughed; then she led the way back to the sunshine outside.

"I think I 've had enough," she said, when once more she stood under the blue October sky.

But the spirit of adventure had come upon Ronald in his turn.

"Come," he begged her. "We 've not been to this end yet. It looks jolly, and we 've plenty of time."

She opened her lips to demur. Then, without a word, she turned and crossed the grass at his side. It was she who had started on the exploration. It was not for her to beg off, leaving the exploration half complete. Nevertheless, she looked longingly backward at the sky, as Ronald led the way into the great, arched vault of another passage.

It was the darkest tunnel they had found as yet, the darkest and the most mysterious. For fifty feet, it ran downward at a sharp angle; then it turned to the left, completely shutting out every beam of the pale gray light which came faintly down from the opening. Slowly, carefully, Ronald crept forward, his fingers sliding along the

wall, his feet feeling every inch of the floorway. Slowly and with infinite, but unspoken terrors, the girl crept after him, afraid to advance, still more afraid to be left behind. Then abruptly she halted and stood as if rooted to the ground.

"Listen!" she said faintly. "I hear voices."

Ronald halted in his turn.

"Ours?" he said jovially.

"No. Others. Men talking."

Ronald laughed, wholly unconscious of her fears.

"If they 're here, we 'll meet them. I fancy we have them bottled up in this hole."

"But it 's not here," she urged. "It came from the side, through the earth."

"The guard, most likely. Well, you 've been complaining of its being too lonesome. We 'll hunt him up, when we get out of this. Are you ready?"

For some reason for which she was wholly unable to account, the distant sound of voices had multiplied Day's terrors tenfold. It seemed to her to add vastly to the strange mystery of her surroundings. The girl was no coward; yet now she longed acutely for the fresh air and sunshine, longed even for the touch of Ronald's strong, warm hand on her fingers. Then she pulled herself

together. This was the first time that Ronald had favoured her with an invitation of any sort. She was not by any means minded to have it the last. She steadied her voice with an effort.

"Go on," she said undauntedly. "I 'll follow." And she heard Ronald move cautiously forward in the darkness.

Only a moment afterward, she heard the clatter of sliding rock, a short, sharp exclamation and the thud of a falling body. The next instant, she came to a sudden halt, with the tips of her toes resting just over the edge of an unseen gash in the flooring.

CHAPTER TWO

IT seemed to Day that, for the space of hours, she stood as if frozen to the earth, awaiting in terror some sound from beneath which should tell her the extent of the tragedy which had befallen her companion. In reality, it was something less than forty-five seconds before she heard Ronald speak.

"Hullo!" he said, and his voice had the measured accent of one who speaks into a telephone.

From force of habit, she adopted his tone, and her accent also was the one generally directed into a receiver.

"Hullo!"

"Is it Day?" he queried, for the telephone impression was still upon him, and he was too much astonished and shaken up by his fall to be able to reason that, in all human probability, Day had not been removed in the space of the last half-minute and her place filled by a stranger.

"Yes, it 's Day," she responded. "Are you — are you killed?"

"No; only sloppy," he replied gravely.

Then, of a sudden, the ludicrousness of their conversation flashed upon them, and Ronald's chuckle was answered by a half-hysterical gasp from Day.

"Where are you?" she asked, at length.

"Somewhere in the bowels of the earth."

Vainly she strove to peer into the blackness at her feet.

"How far?"

"About ten feet."

"Ten feet!" Her fears came back to her and, this time, they were quite concrete. "Are you badly hurt?"

"Only my clothes, and a bump on my brow," he replied composedly. "I landed on my nose in six inches of clay."

Day gasped again.

"Oh, Ronald, don't be so funny! I was so frightened; I thought you were dead, and it 's awful to laugh," she besought him.

"Soft clay, too," he added. "I 'm picking it out of my eyebrows now."

"Come up and let me see," she begged him. "I know you must be hurt."

His laugh reassured her; but not his words.

"You are asking impossible things," he objected. "I can't come up, and you could n't see me, if I did."

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Chiefly because this hole has n't any edges to climb, and because it is pitch dark where you are." His tone was imperturbable.

She caught at the first phrase.

"Not any edges! Then how can you get out?"

"I can't."

She ransacked the corners of her mind for an idea.

"Can't I let down something?" she suggested at length, with a passing recollection of certain books in which her brother's soul, years before, had been wont to delight.

"For instance?" he queried, as casually as if he had been strolling at her side on the terrace.

"Something to climb out on. Something to eat." Her voice was fainter again.

The next instant, the vault echoed with Ronald's laugh.

"By Jove, Day," he said, as soon as he could speak; "do you think I am going to spend my days in this clay-pit?"

"But if you can't get out?"

"Then it 's for you to go after somebody to get me out," he retorted practically.

"Where?"

"Anywhere, so long as it 's handy. What about your voices?"

But Day was deaf to his reply. Smothering the shame that already had assailed her at the thought of the way she had lost her head, she had turned and scrambled away along the dark, arched tunnel, in search of light and air and help.

Quite unexpectedly, she found the three awaiting her together. Her step steadied and grew swifter, as she came in sight of the gray circle of light at the far end of the passage, and she dashed through it and out into the dazzling sunshine at a pace which narrowly escaped demolishing a solitary figure who stood facing the opening in the earth. The figure dodged perceptibly, and his hanging under jaw drooped even lower, as his eyes rested on this unexpected vision, bursting out upon him from the deep places of the earth. He faltered. Then he put up his eyeglass.

"Oh, by George!" he ejaculated.

Day pulled herself up abruptly and looked at him. During the scant two weeks she had lived on British soil, she had not yet come in contact with the newly-imported Englishman. Now that at last she beheld him, in place of reverence, he inspired her mirth. The stiff hat pushed back to show the straight and spiky hair, the wide eyes, the broad black string of the eyeglass, the deeply wrinkled face and the expression of vacant as-

tonishment: all these details went to make up a whole which taxed to the utmost the girl's powers of self-control. Even in the instant of her first glance, she sent a mental apology to the actors whom she had accused of exaggerating the type of stage Englishman. Then abruptly she recalled her manners, recalled, too, the suddenness of her exit from the hole. Small wonder that the stranger had dodged at sight of the unexpected apparition!

"I beg your pardon," she said decorously.

"I — Oh — ah — don't mention it," the stranger responded, with bland haste. Then, turning, he made off across the open stretch of turf leading to the gate.

Day looked after him in sudden desperation. It seemed to her that, with his turning away, her only help of succour was departing from her. Oddly enough, she took no heed of the fact that this taciturn stranger was scarcely the person to be soliloquizing to himself in the bowels of the earth and at the extreme top of his lungs.

"Wait!" she called after him, and her voice was half-pleading, half-imperious.

At her call, he stayed his step and looked over his shoulder.

"I can't," he made accentless, yet emphatic answer, in the widest of London vowels.

"Why not?"

"Because I must catch my train."

"Your — train!" Day's jaw dropped, as she turned from his inexpressive face to the equally inexpressive landscape, as if to discover a locomotive waiting in some inconspicuous corner of the enclosure.

"Yes, my train. I am going to New York."

"To — New York?" Again a dash punctuated her phrase.

"Yes. That 's what I came out for." The announcement, still abnormally broad as to its vowels, was totally lacking in accent.

"But — " Day felt as if her brain were reeling. The stranger's composure, coupled with his obvious haste, his strange speech and more strange assertion, all this, following hard upon the fright of a few moments before, made the girl half doubt her own identity. For the identity of the stranger she made no effort to account.

"Certainly," he iterated. "That is what I came out for."

Then, for one moment, Day bethought herself of certain scenes from *Alice in Wonderland*. The stranger's repartee appeared to be of the same sort.

"But the New York train does n't start from here."

"Oh, no; I know it."

"Then what in the world did you come out here for?" she demanded, forgetting Ronald entirely in the new problem which faced her.

"I came out to go to New York," the stranger reiterated. "Later, I may spend the winter in Quebec; that is, if I can keep from being cold." He paused and peered at the girl near-sightedly, while he fell to fumbling about in his pockets. "Here is my card," he added.

Day glanced at the card which he held out to her. *Sir George Porteous, London*, it read.

"Thank you," she said hurriedly. "It 's all right; I am glad to meet you. It 's your help I want now, not your card, though."

He looked up at her rather distrustfully. This decided young child with the pretty clothes was a new species to him, new, too, the sort of girl who would disdain the bit of pasteboard he was offering her. He shook his head slightly, and sought his eyeglass.

But Day spoke again, this time with some impatience.

"We 're wasting time. Do hurry!"

"Where?" he asked languidly.

With a swift, free gesture, she pointed to the passage behind her.

"Into that hole?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I could n't." The last word was spread broadly over two separate syllables.

"You must."

"I should lose my train," he protested. "Besides, I should lose my way."

Day felt her temper going fast. It rendered her next words rather incomprehensible.

"No matter. You must help get Ronald out."

A faint spark of interest began to manifest itself in Sir George's dull eyes.

"Out?" he echoed.

Day stamped her foot on the ground. It was rude; but at least it served to help her to keep her tongue in check.

"Yes, out. He 's in there, and you must help him."

Sir George Porteous bent upon her a searching glance.

"Why does n't he walk out on his feet?" he queried suddenly.

"He can't."

"Oh."

"He 's fallen into a hole," Day explained. "We were exploring, and the floor ended, and he did n't know it and fell in. And now he can't get out without a man to help him."

With the spasmodic deliberation which charac-

terized his movements, Sir George Porteous felt for his glass and screwed the glass into his eye. Then he gave a long look into Day's flushed face.

"Oh. A chap inside that hole?"

"Yes."

"And in another hole inside?"

"Yes."

For a long moment, Sir George contemplated both the girl and the situation. Then he spoke.

"How rummy!" he observed impartially, and then once more he turned away.

"Wait!" Day said again.

"Oh, but I must go." His fingers shut upon his fob. "It is time for my train."

"But you would n't leave Ronald in there!" she exclaimed, now thoroughly alarmed by his evident intention of abandoning her companion to his fate.

"I must." Then, of a sudden, he made a vague gesture towards the far end of the barracks. "There 's a care-taker in there. I tipped him, and he took me about. I fancy he 's got some sort of a rope, you know. I — I hope you 'll get the poor chap out." And, the gate reached, Sir George Porteous opened the panel and clambered through, catching his toe slightly, as he made his undignified exit. Then he dis-

appeared from view, and Day, looking after him, gave tongue to her thoughts.

"What a dunce!" she said aloud. "But how do you suppose he ever strayed up here?" Then with all haste, she went in search of the care-taker and his rope; and it was not until half an hour later, as she was going down the hill with Ronald that she yielded to the absolute humour of the situation.

And Janet, meanwhile, seated on a stool beside the kitchen range, was busy beating eggs.

The Leslies lived on Saint Louis Street, and their large old house, by rights, should have had three maids to keep it in order. As a matter of fact, it had had four, until the change had come. Then Mrs. Leslie, faced by the alternatives of moving into a smaller house or of taking a larger share of the housework into her own hands, had chosen the latter course. Father and grandfather and great-grandfather had lived within those gray stone walls where, too, all her married life had been spent. Another house would be barren of all association with the past. Better than that, a share in the work, no matter how hard. Accordingly, she had dismissed three of the maids, and had enlarged her household by three new members. And, quite as a matter of course, a part of the work overflowed upon Janet.

And Janet took it bravely. It was not without reason that her brown eyes were resolute, her chin steady. For the rest, she was past fourteen, a dark, thin little maiden whose eager face was only just beginning to show signs of the beauty which the next few years would bring. In temper, she was outwardly placid; but only up to a certain point. That point passed, the fires beneath blazed up into flame. The two clauses of her girlish creed were loving loyalty to her mother, and utter adoration for her older brother. For the sake of those two people and their happiness, Janet would accept all things and make no complaint.

Most girls, however, would have been less stoical than Janet, more ready to feel that their lives held just cause for complaint. From a care-free, servant-filled childhood, a childhood where pretty frocks abounded and where every Thursday afternoon held its especial treat, Janet suddenly found herself promoted to a girlhood where the talk concerned itself with needless expenses, where her new black frock must do duty for two winters, where Thursday treats gave place to Thursday toil, since the day which aforetime had been half-holiday in the convent, was now the day when their one servant took her afternoon out and relegated to the mistress the task of get-

ting tea and dinner. It was much nicer to come in, starved, for tea and bread and butter beside the parlour fire than it was to spread the bread and butter and carry in the heavy tray. And, besides, there was Day.

Janet Leslie was a girl, and entirely human. Being that, she could not fail to be irritated by Day Argyle. It was not alone the pretty clothes which, even in the Leslies' best days, would have been unthinkable to Janet; it was not alone Day's freedom from all care, her bright, blithe irresponsibility; it was not alone the little air of unconscious patronage which crept into Day's manner now and then. It was no one of these; but it was made up from all three, and it was completed by the fashion in which Day apparently sought to monopolize the thoughts of Ronald. All that past summer, Janet had sat by and watched Ronald's growing friendship with another American girl, watched it without a spark of jealousy. But Day was different.

"Save the bowl, Janet!"

The girl's face cleared at the laughing admonition.

"It was n't just the eggs," she answered. "I was beating — "

"Well?"

"Things. Oh, mummy, I do wish you did n't

have to work so hard," she burst out suddenly.

Crossing the room, Mrs. Leslie rested her hands on the slim shoulders.

"Work does n't hurt people, dearie. It is only worry that hurts; and that, thanks to my good children, is growing less, every day."

For her reply, Janet nestled her head backward against her mother's body. A long minute, they rested there together. Then, with a little, cuddling gesture, Mrs. Leslie caressed the brown head and, letting go, crossed the room to a chair. Janet eyed her dubiously.

"But there is a worry, mummy. I can see it in the edge of your eyes," she urged.

Mrs. Leslie laughed.

"Only in the very edge, then. It 's not a real worry, Janet; only a question."

Janet pounded her eggs with renewed vigour.

"Well, what does Day want now?" she demanded at length.

"Day? Nothing."

"She generally does. Last time, it was pink soap to match her toilet things. Time before, it was half my closet, because her own was n't large enough to hold her best clothes."

"You don't like Day?"

"No." The answer came flatly.

"I am sorry. I do."

"You 're welcome to her," Janet observed, above the clatter of the egg-beater. "I don't like Americans."

Her mother smiled.

"What about Sidney ? " she asked.

"Sidney was n't like any other American girl I ever knew," Janet responded with perfect truthfulness, inasmuch as Sidney Stayre, the past summer, was only the second American girl with whom she had ever come in contact. Then she relented. "Day is well enough, mummy, only we don't get on together. That is all, truthfully. We don't fight at all. But what is the question ? "

For the space of a moment, Mrs. Leslie paused to ponder on the innate antagonism between the two young girls. Then she roused herself to answer Janet's query.

"Let me take the eggs, Janet. They are done, I know. The question is how to stretch the house to hold one more person."

Janet, half-way across the kitchen floor, halted to stare at her mother in consternation.

"Mummy! Who now ? "

"Another Argyle. Robert, I think his name is."

"Who is he ? "

"Day's brother."

"I didn't know she had one," Janet said blankly, as she put the bowl into her mother's hands.

Mrs. Leslie, lifting the frothy eggs and watching them drip back into the bowl, was silent. Janet urged her words upon her mother's lagging attention.

"Did you know Day had a brother?"

"No."

"How queer!"

And Janet, having summed up the matter to her own satisfaction, perched herself on the table at her mother's side. Then she renewed her catechism.

"Where is he coming from?"

"New York."

"When?"

"Week after next."

"To stay?"

"Yes, if it suits him."

"I hope it won't," Janet made swift comment. "But where will he stay?"

"Here."

"Where?"

"I don't know yet. Possibly in Ronald's room."

"Where could Ronald go?"

"Up to the top flat."

Janet shook her head.

"He can't, mummy. It would be the finish of him, after all his hard day in the office, if he had to give up his room. Let the new one go."

"He would n't like it, dear."

"Let him lump it, then!" Janet said gracelessly. "Ronald must n't be turned out." Then, as she saw the shadow come into her mother's eyes, "No matter," she added; "I 'll go, myself, mummy. I 'd just as soon, and my room is next to Day's, so they can be together."

"But, Janet — "

"Truly, I don't mind. I 've always liked to be high up, and that room gets all the sun. I 'll move, to-morrow. But, really, don't you think it 's funny we never heard of him? How old is he?"

"A little older than Day."

"Oh, dear!" Janet dropped her chin on her fists. "I do hope he is n't quite so cranky."

But Mrs. Leslie looked up from the bowl in her hands.

"Day isn't cranky, dear. She is only — "

"An American," Janet said, with sudden viciousness, as she slid down from the edge of the table. But she stopped beside her mother's chair and threw her arms around Mrs. Leslie's neck. "Never mind, mummy," she said philosophically. "At

least, he will keep Day busy, so we sha'n't be troubled with either of them." And, bending down to kiss her mother, she went away out of the room, humming to herself in determined disregard of the American invasion of her home. As a rule, Janet Leslie was resolved to make the best of things, even of the present prospect of another Argyle. For the once, however, the gift of prophecy was denied to her; and it was with grim forebodings that she looked forward to the weeks to come.

CHAPTER THREE

"JANET!" There was a rising inflection on the call.

"Yes." The answer came faintly from the top of the house.

"What are you doing?"

"Settling down."

"Possessions, or feelings?" Ronald queried composedly, from his seat on the stairs below.

"Hush!" Janet came to the door of her room and looked down over the stairway rail. "Both, of course; but don't mention it indiscreetly at the top of your voice."

"I am safe; the coast is clear. But what a beastly shame for you to go aloft!"

"No shame at all," Janet protested stoutly. "I love the room; it is only such a tiresome thing, the putting my clothes away."

"Shall I help?" he offered, though without troubling himself to stir.

She laughed down into his merry dark eyes.

"You!" she said scornfully.

"Well, why not? At least, I 'd be quicker than you."

"But there 's no hurry," she answered. "I 've all the week to move. The new youth won't come till Saturday."

"For which be thanked!" Ronald observed devoutly. "Look here, Janet, do you think he will be any addition to the family party?"

Swiftly she held up a warning finger.

"No; they 've gone out," Ronald repeated. "Still, the walls have ears, and I suppose it is n't wise to imperil the family butcher bill. What did you say you were doing?"

"Moving, to make room for the nabob," Janet answered, and, for the life of her, she could not keep an edge of bitterness from her voice.

Ronald rose and stretched himself.

"Let it go, and come out for a turn on the terrace," he suggested.

"I 'd rather —" Janet demurred; then, as she looked down at the tired lines about her brother's lips, she relented. "I 'll be ready, in a few minutes," she said.

"Good child! Put on something warm, though. I 'll go and tell the mater we are starting." And Ronald vanished by way of the drawing-room door.

He found his mother seated by the table in the library, darning his socks; and the pitiless glare

of the electric lamp by her side showed him the two deep wrinkles which the past month had cut into her face. With a sudden protecting gesture, he flung his arm across her shoulder, as he seated himself on the arm of her chair; but he only said, —

"Janet does n't appear to fancy the idea of the new Argyle."

"Not really. I suppose it is because she and Day can't seem to hit it off," Mrs. Leslie said slowly. "How does the idea strike you, Ronald?"

"As if it were in the bargain, and we could n't get out of it," he answered whimsically. "Having let in three Argyles, we can't well stand out on a fourth."

"And, after all, he may be — "

"He probably is," Ronald interrupted placidly. "My only fear is he is too much so."

The eyes of mother and son met, and they both laughed.

"I 'm sorry, dear boy," Mrs. Leslie said then. "I don't mind it; but it is a bit hard on you and Janet, now that you have to count your pennies and your postage stamps, to be thrown in this close connection with a girl like Day who never counts the cost of anything."

Ronald shook his head.

"There are a few others," he suggested. "None

of our friends are exactly frugal. It is only that they have n't the same trick of throwing their money at one."

"I know," his mother assented. "I am sorry. I wish it were n't necessary."

But Ronald rose and squared his shoulders.

"It is necessary, though, and a mighty good thing for us that they like the place and can afford to pay for it," he replied, as he crossed to the fire-place. "It comes high, this boarding with Quebec's elect. I only hope they appreciate the advantages they are getting for their money."

Mrs. Leslie laughed.

"I suspect they don't."

Ronald faced her sharply.

"Why?"

"Because Mrs. Argyle has asked me to serve her tea in her own room."

"Oh!" Ronald's cadence was a falling one. "So she need n't meet the friends of her landlady?"

"I suppose so."

And then Ronald laughed, laughed with a boyish, big-bodied appreciation of the joke. Mrs. Leslie, in her recent mourning, was not receiving just then. Nevertheless, her drawing-room was a meeting-ground for the many old friends who could not afford to miss her out of their

busy lives. And, moreover, these friends were not of a class to hold out eager hands to stranger Americans. The quaint little old city has a trick of refusing to open her social doors to foreign gold.

"Let her," he said tersely at length. "And yet, do you know, I am sorry for Day."

Mrs. Leslie threaded her needle. Then she looked up.

"I am glad to hear you say it, Ronald. Day is a good girl."

"And a bright one," Ronald added. "I wish she and Janet would take to each other."

"Give them time," his mother suggested. "Girls are slow to get acquainted, and they have only known each other for three weeks."

"But in the same house. And, besides — " Ronald hesitated.

From over her work, his mother looked up at him keenly.

"Well, son?"

He frowned intently at the cuff on the arm which rested against the mantel.

"I 'm not sure that I blame Janet, either," he said slowly. "I like Day, myself; I like to have her about. She is good fun, and she knows how to take chaff without losing her temper. But with Janet — " He abandoned his cuff and faced his

mother directly. "Has it ever seemed to you that Day was a little top-loftical with Janet?"

His mother nodded.

"Yes. And you have noticed it, too?"

"Noticed it, and hated it," Ronald answered briefly. "I can't understand it, either."

"I can," Mrs. Leslie said.

"What?" The question came sharply.

"That Day regards Janet as merely the child of her landlady." Mrs. Leslie's tone, instead of bitterness, held only quiet amusement.

Ronald spun about on his heel.

"What rot!" he said sharply.

"No; not altogether," his mother demurred. "The fact is, she is right. The Argyles came here, strangers, to board with us. There is no need for them to consider themselves as our friends."

"Mercifully not," Ronald assented.

"But you said you liked Day," his mother reminded him.

"So I do. She is bright and pretty and good fun to have in the house. Still, if she is going to be hateful to Janet, I won't have anything to do with her."

"Janet can take care of herself," that young person observed from the doorway. "You need n't worry about me, brother. There are other girls besides Day Argyle."

"I know that," Ronald said a little moodily. "Still, there are n't many who might be better fun to know. I hate, though, this liking people with mental reservations. Day is a good, all-round sort of girl, if only she would treat you a little better."

Janet's chin rose in the air.

"I did n't know it was a question of how she treated me," she said conclusively.

Ronald laughed, as he never failed to do, when Janet took that tone.

"Come down off your high horse, before it balks and spills you," he admonished his sister. "We all of us know that Day is n't too polite to you. Moreover, we none of us know why I have n't come in for a share of the same manners."

But Janet smiled mockingly.

"Look in your glass," she advised him, from the arm of her mother's chair where she had perched herself.

It was still early, so early that the Basilica bells were clashing across the evening air, when the two young Leslies stepped out into the street. The stars glittered frostily above them, and low over the Saint Louis Gate hung the thread-like crescent of a baby moon. Nine times, Janet made grave obeisance to the moon; then she turned and caught her hand through her brother's arm.

"Money in your pocket, Ronald?" she queried gayly.

By way of answer, he drew out a copper penny, waved it before her eyes and then returned it to his pocket, clanking it ostentatiously against its fellows.

"Safe for this month, Janet," he reassured her then. "That 's where we fellows score. You girls have n't any pockets."

"At least, then, we don't have to worry about our pockets being empty," she retorted. "Oh, what a night! Let 's run!"

With a laugh, Ronald brought his sister to a standstill beneath one of the electric lights.

"What a romp you are, Janet!" he said, in mock rebuke.

"Why not?" she returned undauntedly. "I 'll race you up the terrace and back, and beat you, too."

"Don't be too sure," he cautioned her.

"You 'll do it?" she queried eagerly for, of late, Ronald had been slow about sharing in her childish pranks.

"Sure. That is, unless there are people about."

"Come, then," she urged. "If we hurry, we can get there before anybody else is out. It 's cold, and I feel funny, and I want to run fast, fast."

"You 'd better save your breath," he advised her. Nevertheless, he yielded to her repeated tuggings at his elbow and, side by side, they faced about and directed their steps towards the terrace. Only once on the way Janet spoke.

"If Sidney were only here!" she said.

And Ronald made regretful answer, —

"But she is n't."

At the corner of the Ring, they met the Argyles. Day, walking slightly ahead of her parents, was the first to see them. She hailed Ronald eagerly.

"Where are you going?"

"Just up to the terrace."

"Lovely! I 'll go with you."

Notwithstanding Janet's furtive pinches on his arm, Ronald made prompt answer, as he was in duty bound to do.

"That 's good. We were longing for exercise, and missed you when we came out." Then, hat in hand, he faced Mrs. Argyle. "You 'll trust Day to our care, I hope," he added.

Mrs. Argyle's face, at rest, was a bit cold. It lighted now, however, as it never failed to do when her eyes rested upon Ronald Leslie's face.

"I always know that Day is safe, when she is in your hands," she said cordially. "Don't stay too late, Day, and don't take cold."

"I like that boy," she added to her husband,

as they went on their way. "He is manly and well-bred, and abnormally handsome. Mrs. Leslie, too, is n't like the usual type of boarding-house keepers."

"But it 's not a boarding-house," her husband objected. "And, you know, John said — "

"John!" Mrs. Argyle's tone was expressive. "He always has a pensioner or two on his hands, and I stopped listening to his pitiful tales, years and years ago. Still, I must confess that we were fortunate to get into such a charming old house."

"What about Rob?" Mr. Argyle asked, for he had but just returned from a week in Montreal. "Did she object to taking him?"

"At first, she said she could n't; but I finally argued her into it. He is to have Janet's room."

"What becomes of Janet?" her husband asked practically.

"She goes upstairs, somewhere or other. These old houses seem to have endless room in them. Still, you must admit that it was a good thing that I never had happened to speak of Rob's coming." Mrs. Argyle laughed lightly. "It was the merest chance that I had n't; but his plans were so uncertain that I thought I 'd best wait. If she had heard of him in the first of it, I am sure she would never have taken any of us in;

and I am too comfortable there, to be willing to move."

"And Rob comes?" Mr. Argyle said interrogatively.

"Saturday noon."

"I am glad. If only he is better!"

And, meanwhile, up on the deserted terrace, Day had been voicing the same wish.

"Not heard of Rob?" she said. "How strange!"

Ronald laughed.

"That is what we have been thinking," he said frankly.

"But I supposed my mother had told you he was coming."

"Why did n't you?" Janet asked, with crisp pertinence, from her place at Ronald's other side.

"I? Why, really, I don't know. Because girls don't talk much about their brothers, I suppose."

"But I do," Janet returned a little shortly.

Day laughed good-naturedly. Her contentment, pacing the vast sweep of boards in time to Ronald's rhythmic tread, was too complete to be easily ruffled.

"So I have observed," she assented. "In America, we usually leave our boys to speak for themselves."

She was quite without intention of bitterness.

Nevertheless, Ronald interposed, for he was quick to feel the undernote of antagonism between the two girls, and liking Day and adoring Janet, he was anxious to have them friends.

"And so you have brought your American manners into Canada?" he queried.

"Why not? Besides, I have an idea that Rob would prefer not to have me discuss him."

"Because?" Ronald inquired.

However, Janet broke in with a question.

"Then you 've known, all the time, that he was coming?"

"We were n't sure he 'd be able."

"How do you mean?" Janet obviously was resolved to push her investigations to a satisfactory finale.

"Whether the doctor would let him come."

"Why not? Is he — delicate?" Janet demanded, with the sudden appetite of girlhood for a languid hero.

Day's laugh cut the air with a mirth which infected Ronald, although he had not the least idea what was the cause of her merriment.

"Rob delicate!" she echoed, when she could speak. "You should see him."

"Then what does he have a doctor for?"

Day sobered suddenly.

"His leg. He was half through Exeter and

making a splendid record, just in the thick of everything. He was so big they put him on the football team, and he was awfully hurt in one of the scrimmages. They say he saved the game, though," she added, with obvious pride.

"Poor chap! That 's lean satisfaction," Ronald made grave comment.

Day smiled, partly in her content with her brother's prowess, partly in amusement at Ronald's colonial viewpoint.

"You 'd better not say that to Rob," she advised him.

But Janet still pursued her investigations.

"What did it do to him?" she asked.

"Nobody seems quite sure. It did something to the tendons, they think. It happened just a year ago; and, ever since, he has been under the care of the best man in New York. He has had to stay right in the city, all summer long, and take all manner of treatments and things. We supposed he would have to be there, all winter; but, last week, he wrote that the doctor said he might come up here for a while. Mother is worried to death. She does n't know whether it means he is better, or whether the doctor has given up the case."

"Why does n't she ask him?"

"Rob, or the doctor?"

"Your brother."

And Day made unhesitating answer, —

"Because it would n't do any good. Rob never would tell, if he were n't better."

And Ronald again made comment, —

"Poor chap!"

Day laughed.

"You 'd best not say that to him," she advised again. "Rob hates being pitied."

"A fellow can't help being sorry, though," Ronald said bluntly. "How much does it knock him out?"

"He 's out of school, of course; and he can't play football, nor dance, nor walk much — at least, he could n't, when I saw him. He may have gained since then, though."

"How long since you have seen him?"

"Not since the first week in June. We came here straight from the country, you know."

"Day Argyle!"

Ronald felt the explosion coming; but not even his warning pressure on Janet's arm could suppress it.

"Well, what of it?" Day queried unconcernedly, while she changed the position of one of the pins in her hat.

"Nothing," Janet said shortly. "Only, if he

were my brother, I would n't go off to the country for six months, without seeing him."

"But it was n't so long," Day corrected her. "It is n't five months yet. Besides, what good would I do? Of course, my father saw him, every few days, and my mother went down to the city for a week, before we came up here. She had to get clothes and things, and then she wanted to see Rob for herself."

"Naturally." Then Janet's mouth shut with a snap.

To her own surprise, Day felt a sudden need to justify herself.

"I 'd have gone, if Rob had wanted me, or if I could have done him any good," she said, with the slow gravity which, to Ronald's mind, marked her sweetest moods. "I love Rob; he 's a darling and I think he is fond of me, but we generally go our own ways. He is all boy, does n't care for girls nor girl things, only to criticise my clothes, when they don't suit him."

"Oh," Janet said shrewdly. "I begin to see. You fight."

Day hesitated. Then, instead of being irritated by Janet's persistence, she spoke frankly and with a little tone of sadness.

"No," she said thoughtfully. "Sometimes, I wish we did; it would bring us closer together.

When we were children, I 've heard mother tell, we used to squabble, one minute, and love each other to distraction, the next. Then mother went abroad, and took me, and Rob went away to school. That lasted for two years, and, since I came home, we have never been together much, nor seemed to be able to get at each other. I am fond of him; but I 'm afraid of him. He does n't seem to me like my own brother really, but more like a visitor, when he comes home. We are n't nearly as much related as you two are. And then, most of this last year, he 's been in hospital or his room, and I 've been in school, all day long. And so — " Abruptly she stopped her earnest speaking, stopped it to hide the little break which so rarely came into her gay young voice.

In utter silence, they walked the length of the terrace. When Day spoke again, it was with a laugh; but the laugh was plainly forced.

"I really don't see why I have told you all this stuff," she said apologetically.

Swiftly Janet stepped to her side, linked her arm in the arm of Day and gave it a little squeeze.

"Because you knew we 'd be sorry and like to help," she said rather incoherently, but with a tone she had never used to Day until that hour.

CHAPTER FOUR

"SHALL you wish breakfast at Dudswell Junction?"

"I don't know."

"But I must telegraph for it, over night."

"But really I can't tell till I see it."

The Pullman conductor, whose broad shoulders and level eyes betrayed the fact that he had worn the Queen's uniform, looked down at his passenger with some amusement. Was it for the defence of the rights of such an one as this that he had offered himself to Mauser bullets? Then steadfastly he forced the amusement out of his eyes.

"I must ask you to decide, before you go to bed."

"But I 'm not going to bed," was the surprising answer.

"Not going to bed?"

"Oh, no. I may lie down for a bit; but I really sha'n't undress at all."

From his place across the aisle, a boy looked up from his magazine. He too was big and blond

and straight of shoulder and of eye. Unlike the conductor, however, he saw no need to repress the mirth which assailed him at the detailed utterances of his British neighbour.

All the way from New York, Rob Argyle had been gloating over the unconscious humour of that neighbour, over his accent, his clothing, over his wonderful amount of hand luggage. Rob, carrying a suitcase and leaning rather heavily on the stick in his hand, had sought the Pullman ticket office in the Grand Central Station at New York. To his obvious impatience, his pathway had been blocked by a heap of luggage, a porter and a diminutive Englishman with an utterance which seemed to be chiefly composed of the letter *A*, and that at the widest possible span.

"Oh; but really I can't," he was remonstrating.

"Change at Springfield," the clerk reiterated mechanically.

"Get out of one car and get into another?"

"Yes."

"But I can't."

The clerk tapped on the desk before him.

"There is no through train."

"Oh; but there should be."

"Possibly."

The Englishman's face lighted with sudden hope.

"You mean there possibly will be?"

"No."

"And I must change out of one car into another just like it?"

Patiently the clerk set himself to explain.

"You can have a drawing-room car to Springfield. There you will get the Quebec sleeper."

"Oh. And what will I do with it, when I do get it?"

Not even ten years of answering wholly inane questions could blunt the clerk's appreciation of this one. Nevertheless, his tone was dry, as he said tersely, —

"Move in."

"Yes. But who will carry my luggage?"

And the clerk made unfeeling answer, —

"Lug it, yourself." Then he turned to meet Rob's eye. "To Springfield? Yes. And a berth reserved to Quebec? Yes. Very well."

But once more the Englishman spoke.

"Oh, I say, will you please be so good as to reserve me a berth, too?"

"What name?"

The Englishman dived into his pockets for a card; but the card eluded his gloved fingers.

"What name?" the clerk iterated unfeelingly. "You 'd better hurry. It is time for your train."

His hat wildly askew and his glass screwed into his right eye, the Englishman faced back to the window.

"Porteous," he said. "Sir George Porteous." Then, at the heels of the porter, he followed Rob out to the train.

It was with feelings of unmixed satisfaction that Rob saw the conductor leading Sir George Porteous to the chair next his own. Rob's humour was always ready for new sources of mirth; his two-minute study of the Englishman convinced him that here would be an unfailing source. Then, of a sudden, his satisfaction gave place to gloomy foreboding. The conductor carried a suitcase; Sir George Porteous was followed by the porter from his hotel, bearing two bags and a steamer-rug; and the hotel porter was followed in his turn by the porter of the car, and the porter of the car carried an overcoat, a raincoat, a rifle-case and a vast, unwieldy budget cased in tartan drilling and bound up with a shawlstrap. And Rob had a suitcase of his own, and, moreover, his lame leg demanded plenty of room on this, its first journey. The doctor had warned him to be careful, and Rob's own recent experience of plaster bandages had added force to the warning. With his uninjured leg, he gave a surreptitious kick at the tartan-covered budget which threatened to topple

over on his knees. Then he barricaded himself with his suitcase and his stick, and prepared to enjoy himself as best he might.

Had the truth been told, Rob Argyle was in a position where his salvation lay in his sense of humour, in its happy trick of extracting fun from the most commonplace of situations. Otherwise, Rob's existence would have been rather a bore, just then. For two entirely happy years, his school life had centered in making a good enough record in his classes to balance his increasing prowess in athletics. Already he was captain of his crew and quarterback on his football team; already, though college was still two years off, his dreams were pointing towards a 'varsity football team of the future, when, with a sudden snap, his dream was shattered and he awoke. His cap on the back of his head, and the brown pigskin cuddled into the curve of his arm, he had marched away to the field, on the day of the Andover game, determined to make a record, or die in the attempt. He came near achieving both ends in the same hour. As he went down in the heart of a scrimmage, even before things grew black about him, his ears were humming with the sound of many voices shrieking his name in frantic chorus.

As a matter of course, he did not die. He was

pulled out from the bottom layer of a heap of kicking, squirming boys, carried off the field and given the rough and ready care that goes with such events. That night, he went to the football supper, hilarious as ever, although he confessed to a dozen bruises and a queer feeling in his leg. It was not until a week later that the authorities of the school succeeded in convincing him that it was time he started for home and a specialist.

Since the night, eleven months before, when the cab had deposited him at his own front steps, Rob Argyle had been gritting his teeth and training himself to live upon the memory of his past prowess. He had been plucky and, for the most part, good-tempered. Nevertheless, in looking backward, he was forced to admit to himself that the time had dragged heavily. There had been five months of hospital and of a daily treatment which had been a pain to the flesh and a bore to the soul; there had been three months in his room, with the doctor dropping in at odd hours and performing strange tricks with a knee which declined to bend; there had been three more months in a boarding-house, after the last of his family had migrated to the country. Rob had urged their going away. He hated domestic coddling with a furious and holy hatred.

To his present point of view, it mattered little to Rob that the doctor, after long months of indecision, had hinted that, with proper care, he might have a well leg in time. Time was finite, when it was a question of college athletics; and the deliberations of a specialist, as Rob had learned to his cost, were infinite. He sought to beguile the hours by reading treatises on football or rowing, and the many stories in which sports play an important part. He usually ended by throwing the books on the floor, with an unworded regret that, in place of the floor, he could not substitute the writer's head. What was the use of books to a fellow who knew all about it, far more than did the writers, and was, all at once and for no obvious reason, cut out of the game? Moreover, Rob had always been prone to regard books as a means to an end. Plainly and without wasted words, his father had told him, at the end of his first month in Exeter, that he could keep on with athletics only just so long as his standing in his classes gave satisfaction to the school and family powers. Like most healthy boys, Rob took his Greek as a pill, and sugar-coated it with sports.

And now? Forgetting his British neighbour, he crossed his hands at the back of his head and stared out at the acres of brown salt marshland.

Football was not, nor yet rowing. Possibly they never again would be. His lip curled scornfully at a momentary picture of himself, dawdling over interminable golf links and pottering about after a two-inch ball. And, as yet, even that was beyond him. What could he do? Whistling softly, he considered the situation.

Slowly and with care, he could walk about the house, and even for short distances outside. He could not dance, so what was the use of going to parties, even suppose he was lucky enough to be invited to any, in this strange city where his winter was to be spent. Then he checked himself abruptly. After all, he was getting back to the things he could not do; and it was much more in keeping with his ideas to count the things he could. At least, he was out of hospital, and able to get about again. And, as his mind went back to that cheering crowd which had witnessed his downfall, he confessed to himself that it all had been worth the while — almost.

Besides, there was Day. Strangely enough, this would be the first winter for years that the brother and sister had spent in the same house. Europe and school and finally the hospital had come in between. As a child, Rob had adored his little sister. In fact, it was he who had given her her name, substituting it for the prim

Aurora which, in company with a mammoth silver urn, she had inherited from an ancient aunt. In their youngest days, they had squabbled and made up without cease, finding their worst punishment in the separation which followed on the heels of their more vigorous quarrels. Together they had devised and executed many a prank, had invented games without number and, best of all, cuddled together on the old sofa in the upstairs hall, they had exchanged confidences and dreamed dreams of a future when Rob should be a famous poet, or else a locomotive engineer, and Day should cook griddlecakes for his supper, when he came home, tired, at night. And then Europe had swallowed Day, and brought the end of it all.

Since then, they had gone their different ways. Really, it was surprising how little they had seen of each other, least of all during that last winter when Rob's hospital and Day's young gayeties had raised a double barrier against their united interests. It was surprising, too, how little Rob regretted the fact, how little he missed Day out of his life. In reality, when he thought of his sister at all, it was as the curly-headed child who used to snuggle against his shoulder, not as the dainty, unruffled maiden in the gray fur coat and the fluffy feathers, the maiden who came, now and then, to sit down by his narrow bed and say polite things

about being sorry. And yet, underneath all the oppression of the fluffy finery and all the politeness, Rob Argyle held firmly to the notion that Day would be a good comrade, if one only knew how to get acquainted with her. Perhaps his chance was coming now.

Only the dropping sun, carving a golden trail across the brown sea marshes, saw the sudden gentling of Rob's keen blue eyes. For himself, Rob hated coddling. Nevertheless, on one of his holidays spent in the home of his chum, he had seen a younger sister perch herself on the chum's knee and twist his hair, while she talked nonsense into his ears. It had looked good fun, and Rob had felt strangely out of it. He remembered it now with a slight pang. Day, in her gray fur coat, would have been such a good little bundle to hold, if only she had perched herself on the edge of the bed, in reach of his strong young arms. But quite likely she had never thought of it. Impatiently he moved his chair to get the dazzle out of his eyes, and the sun, striking across his forehead, turned his hair from yellow to a tawny red.

He had had one letter from Day, since she had reached Quebec. It had smelled of violets, and its wax was violet, too. It had been full of her young enthusiasm over her new surroundings, full

of her walks and drives, full, also, of one Ronald Leslie who appeared to be holding a place far in the foreground of her daily life. There was a sister, somewhere in the background. She called herself Janet, and his mother had mentioned her once or twice. She and Ronald were unknown quantities, two of them. As the dusk fell into darkness, Rob found himself wondering how the equation would work itself out.

Two hours later, as the Quebec sleeper slid northward, Rob was forgetting all such self-seeking, while, over the top of his magazine, he watched his British neighbour. They had the car quite to themselves, and Rob's satisfaction had come back upon him in full measure, when he had seen the Englishman squirm his way into a luggage-heaped section diagonally across the aisle. Ten minutes later, there had been a tussle of wills between the Englishman and the conductor. The porter, passing through the car, had fallen headlong over some unseen obstacle, and the conductor had been forced to explain at great length that passengers were not expected to spread out their dressing-cases, open, in the aisle.

"But I must have a drink," Sir George explained in his turn, with seeming irrelevance.

"Well, why not?"

Sir George leaned back in his seat.

"I can't get a drink, you know, without a cup," he reminded his adversary.

"There 's a glass at the end of the car."

Sir George shook his head.

"Really, I could n't drink out of that," he said fixedly.

"As you will." The answering tone was crisp. "Still, you must keep your things in your own section."

"I can't."

"You must."

With an air of infinite leisure, Sir George took a small silver mug from his open case, rose and vanished in the direction of the water tank. As he rounded the corner, the conductor deftly picked up the case, perched it on top of the tartan budget, and went in search of the porter. Two minutes later, Sir George came back, walking with the unsteady pace of one whose sea-legs are not yet adapted to land journeyings, and bearing in his hand the filled cup. Deliberately he seated himself, deliberately quaffed his cup, deliberately turned to face Rob, screwing, the while, his glass in his off eye for the sake of getting a better view of his solitary travelling companion.

"Fellow seems a bit arbitrary, you know," he observed sententiously.

Then, turning back again, he rose and departed to empty the dregs from his mug.

Still later, and while the white-coated porter was busy with the berths, Rob cast aside his magazine and annexed the conductor.

"What 's the exhibit, across the aisle?" he demanded.

"Plain freak."

"And going?" Rob queried.

"To Quebec."

Rob stretched out his lame leg on the opposite seat and made a gesture of invitation.

"Sit down; that is, unless you are busy. Are there many like him up there?"

"Not so many. It 's a city where one gets all sorts; but this is a rare one."

"You know the place well?" Rob inquired.

"Rather."

"Is it —" Rob cast about in his mind for a comprehensive question. "Is it bad in winter?"

"Not if you don't mind cold. The sports are good."

"What, for instance?"

"Hockey, skiing, sliding, snowshoes."

But Rob shook his head.

"All up for me. I 'm just out of hospital."

"Beg pardon. I remember noticing —"

"That I walked like a sawhorse?" Rob in-

quired composedly. "There 's no need to beg my pardon, though. It 's not pretty; but there 's no especial disgrace about it."

"What happened ? "

"Football. I went down in a scrimmage, last year."

"A whole year ? What a beastly bore! "

Rob looked up to meet the honest eyes which somehow matched the voice.

"Was n't it ? But you sound as if you knew something about it, yourself."

"I was in South Africa, and had a bullet in my leg. It was n't fun."

Rob gave him a sidelong glance, half-whimsical, half-sympathetic.

"Not much. However, it has its compensations — when one thinks of the cause. Anyway, you came out of it well."

"And you ? "

Rob shook his head. Then he laughed.

"Perhaps," he said. "Give me time."

And then the porter came to make his berth.

Sir George Porteous did take breakfast at Dudswell, the next morning; and, over the table, he and Rob kept up a random and desultory fire of talk. When Rob, fresh and starchy as if from his own tub at home, had made his morning appearing, he had been met by a wild flapping of the

opposite curtains. The flapping, aimless and furious, had been followed by the thrusting forth of one shirt-sleeved arm which waved in air for an instant, as if to preserve the balance of some unstable body hidden behind the dark green draperies, then withdrew itself again into the unseen regions behind the curtains. A moment later, there protruded the head of Sir George Porteous, tousled, wild-eyed, the hair erect, the mouth ajar. With the utter absence of expression which sometimes accompanies violent physical exertion, the gaze of Sir George Porteous travelled slowly down the car, while the lower portions of the curtains agitated themselves crazily. Then, of a sudden, in the course of its travels the glance rested upon Rob, sleek, smiling and peacefully immaculate from the topmost lock of his yellow hair to the shoe-lace of his lame foot. The head withdrew itself hastily. Then, —

"Oh, by George!" came, muffled, but distinct, from the folds of the curtains.

Nevertheless, Sir George was promptly on the platform, as the train drew up at the door of the breakfast-room. To be sure, his cuffs were not, nor yet his eyeglass, and a huge safety pin, produced from the depths of his inexhaustible dressing-case, held the edges of his collar from rolling back to display his lack of certain of the more

essential forms of haberdashery. With an unwonted haste which owed its origin to repeated warnings from the porter, he stepped down from the car and started for the breakfast-room door. Then deliberately he turned back to Rob who, by means of the conductor and his stick, was making a toilsome progress down the steps.

"Oh, I say, can't I give you a hand somehow?" he asked. "It 's so tiresome, you know, not to get about." And, suiting his step to Rob's, he crossed the platform at his side.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROB opened the door of his room and applied his eye to the crack.

"What in thunder is the row?" he asked.

Ronald Leslie, rushing down the stairs from the third story, stayed his steps at the question.

"Row enough. Girl gone, and my mother ill in bed."

"Seriously?" Rob's accent changed. His one week in the house had taught him to have a hearty liking for Mrs. Leslie.

"No; only a nervous headache. She has them now and then. Usually they only last a day; but they knock her out completely, while they do last."

"Then you 're not worried about her?"

"Not half so much as I am about the breakfast. That brute of a girl took French leave, last night."

"Hang the breakfast!" Rob advised him.

"That 's all right for you; but your mother and Day would sing a different song."

"Go cook it, then."

"That 's what I called Janet for," Ronald explained. "I have made up the fire, and she will be down in a minute. Breakfast won't be very late."

"No matter if it is. Can Janet cook ? "

"I suppose so, after a fashion. Most girls can. You won't starve. There she comes now," Ronald added, with a sigh of relief, as Janet, whose unvarying neatness had not failed her in the crisis of a five-minute toilet, appeared at the top of the stairs.

With a suddenness which reminded himself of Sir George Porteous, Rob withdrew his head from the crack until her light steps had passed his door. Then, hearing no sound of Ronald's departure, he opened the door again. True enough, he found Ronald still outside.

"Well ? " Rob said questioningly.

"Well." Ronald's tone showed that his relief was permanent.

"What are you doing ? "

"Getting my breath after my exertions."

"And your sister ? "

"Getting breakfast."

"Why don't you go down and help her ? "

"Me ? I can't cook."

Through the crack, Rob eyed the tall Canadian with sudden scorn.

"What a futile sort of fellow you are!" he commented. "No matter. I 'll go, myself." And, before Ronald could make reply, the closing of the door was followed by sounds of splashing and spluttering, and, later, by hurried, uneven steps and by the soft beat of brushes. When the door opened again, the hall was empty. Ronald, in something dangerously akin to injured dignity, had betaken himself to his own room to add the last touches to his uncompleted toilet.

Janet, meanwhile, had set the table and deluged the stove in her hurried filling of the coffee-pot. Then, frowning intently, she gave her whole mind to the task of fitting a large steak to a small grid-iron, without leaving a two-inch frill of meat to dangle about over the coals. She made an attractive picture, as she bent above the table, her sleeves turned back from her round, brown wrists and her hair, ruffled with the heat and with her haste, standing out in a brown aureole around her intent young face. She started up into abrupt self-consciousness, however, as Rob came hurrying and hobbling into the room.

"Good morning, Biddy!" he hailed her from the threshold. "Your brother said you were in hot water, this morning, and I came down to help cook."

Janet stared at him in amazement. Not

even Ronald's whole-hearted devotion would have brought him to the rescue in such a crisis as this. Like most of his fellow countrymen, Ronald Leslie had in his own mind a well-established line between masculine and feminine duties, and, no matter how good might have been his intentions, it would never have occurred to him that it was possible for him to cross that line. Still less, however, would it have occurred to Janet.

"You help cook?" she echoed blankly.

"Yes. Why not? Here, you give me that, while you do the toast." And Rob, laying hold of the gridiron, with a few deft touches packed the surrounding frill into its proper place.

"But do you know how?" Janet's tone was still a little dubious.

"Sure. I camped out, all summer before last, and none of the other fellows could cook so much as a plate of porridge and have it fit to eat," Rob explained, with obvious pride. Then he seized a stove-handle and laid bare a bed of glowing coals. "Oh, I say, this is fine! You can make toast at that end. I want this."

And, before Janet could quite grasp the situation, she and Rob Argyle, the stranger whose coming she had so dreaded and feared, were cozily bending down, side by side, over the blazing fire in the kitchen range.

Janet had been spending the day at Cap Rouge, when Rob reached Quebec. Ronald had fetched her home so late in the evening that she had had only a momentary glimpse of the new member of the household. That glimpse, however, had been enough to send Janet to bed in a mood where admiration and awe struggled vainly together for mastery. The day which had followed, and the week which had followed that, had done little to decide that mastery. Janet had been busy with her school and with her light household duties; Rob had been wholly engrossed with settling himself into his new quarters. As consequence, the two had scarcely met, save at mealtimes and when, now and then of an evening, they were brought together by way of Ronald and Day. Nevertheless, as the time went on, Janet's admiration kept pace with her awe.

In all truth, few girls could have kept from admiring Rob Argyle. He was so honest and alert and off-hand, so strong and hearty in spite of his lame leg, so good to look at and so jovial to talk and to be talked to that Janet, now and then, had found herself dangerously near to putting him on a pedestal in the secret places of her girlish mind. She liked him in all sorts of ways; but she was unfeignedly afraid of him and for no obvious cause. And no one in the world would have been

more filled with mirth at the thought of arousing Janet's fears than would Rob Argyle himself.

The reasons of Janet's fears were complex and mingled. Chief among them lay Rob's stick which so rarely left his side. The spirit of motherhood, born in all girls, was strongly intrenched in Janet Leslie's character. Her independent manner, her firm little chin and the resolute poise of her head: all these were the mask of a hidden gentleness which made her swift to take in the contrast between Rob Argyle's buoyant pluckiness and the heavy drag of his foot as he moved about the house. His stout brown stick held a curious fascination for her; it seemed to stand for so much that she longed to say to him, yet dared not put into words. In a sense, it set him apart from the other boys she had known. He bore the difference lightly; yet she felt sure they both were conscious of it, when they were together. It rendered her shy and monosyllabic. She watched him from under her lashes, and talked to him almost as little as did Ronald who had frankly declared to her his inability to get on with this easy-going youth to whom reservations were not and who appeared to think that friends would be his for the asking.

As a general rule, friends had been Rob's for the asking. In the happy-go-lucky life of a large

preparatory school, he had owed his popularity far more to his personality than to his paternal fortune. Grown up among other jovial, outspoken fellows, he had learned the trick of meeting all strangers with a smile and an outstretched hand. For the first time in his life, since he had come to Quebec, he had learned what it was to have his smile ignored, his open hand disregarded. On Janet's side, this was due to shyness; on Ronald's part, to the chilly English inability to make friends at sight. And Rob was shrewd to read the causes. In consequence, he put on his sunniest smile to coax Janet from her shell; but, after the second day, he treated Janet's tall brother with a breezy sort of contempt which was as new to Ronald as it was wholly undeserved.

That morning had been their nearest approach to cordial relations. Ronald, up betimes to look at the furnace which had come under his care, had made early discovery of the empty kitchen. With his heart near his heels, he had gone to acquaint his mother with the fact of the servant's departure. Her faint voice, muffled and forlorn, answering to his knock, had sent his heart still lower. He knew the voice, knew the day of solitary suffering which it portended. Mumbling an excuse which he fondly hoped would reassure his mother, he turned away and tramped up the next

flight of stairs in search of Janet. Janet's ill-concealed consternation had completed his discomfiture. It had been a relief when Rob, aroused by the unwonted stir in the house, had opened his door to inquire its cause. Ronald pitied Janet acutely. Nevertheless, he had left her to cope with the breakfast, while he retired to his room to smooth his hair and his feelings which had been ruffled by Rob's attitude of criticism. Ronald Leslie was not critical of others. He preferred to receive as little criticism as he gave. Rob's words had gone on his temper and turned it slightly on edge.

Day's lips had parted in surprise, when she entered the dining-room, that morning, to find Janet seated behind the coffee-pot, while Rob, crocky and hilarious, limped into the room with the platter in his hands.

"What has happened?" she demanded.

Rob set down the platter with a flourish. Then, before Janet could speak, —

"Merely a new butler," he replied coolly.

Day raised her brows, as she looked at the cuffs of her brother, usually so immaculate in all of his belongings.

"Do you generally go into the coal cellar, when you buttle?" she queried saucily; but there was a slight flavour of criticism in her tone.

Laughing, he dropped into his place on the opposite side of the table.

"No; only in seasons of famine. Janet and I have been getting breakfast."

"You? And Janet?" The words made two distinct questions.

"Yes. We have gone into partnership." Rob nodded across at Janet who was blushing above the cups. "We are predicting a great success for ourselves, too," he added, as Ronald drew Mrs. Argyle's chair back from the table.

"Mamma," Day turned to her mother almost petulantly; "do ask these people what has happened."

"Ronald told me. Mrs. Leslie is ill, and the maid has gone. What are you going to do about it, Janet?" she asked kindly, for she could not fail to admire the girlish energy with which Janet had thrown herself into the breach.

And Janet made plucky answer, —

"Eat breakfast, and then wash the dishes."

"With my help," Rob interpolated.

"In which?" she asked gayly, for the memory of their frolic over the fire, still uppermost in her mind, had destroyed her fear, for the time being.

"Both, of course. We eat. You wash. I wipe," he replied tersely, as he attacked his steak and buttered toast.

But Janet shook her head.

"You 'd break them," she made enigmatic answer; but she laughed up into his blue eyes, as she gave him his cup of coffee.

Nevertheless and in spite of Janet's strictures, Rob did wipe the dishes. Day came into the china closet and found him at Janet's elbow, girt in a gingham pinafore and with a long brown towel in his hands.

"The cab is here, Rob," she said, from the threshold.

"What cab?"

"Yours. You were going out for a drive."

"Hang the cab!" Rob made cheery answer, as he polished a cup with a zeal which threatened to wreck its handle.

"But it is here," Day reiterated. "Mother is going, too."

"Let her go three, if she wants," Rob said blandly. "I 'm busy."

"I know. Only —"

For a moment, Rob looked benignly down at his sister, as if the difference in their ages had been measured by years, not moons.

"Go with her, Day, and let me out of it, there 's a dear little soul," he urged, and, as he spoke, some sudden impulse made him rest his hand on her shoulder.

"In spite of Janet's strictures, Rob did wipe the dishes." *Page* 78.

Hastily she drew out of his reach.

"Oh, Rob, that greasy dishwater!" was all she said; but her brother's teeth shut hard together and, as she turned away, he looked after her with pained blue eyes which, all at once, had lost their sparkle.

A pause followed her going. Then Janet said shyly, —

"It is too bad for you to lose your drive."

"I don't care about driving," Rob said curtly. "I can go, any day. Oh, confound it! Now see what I 've done!" And he held up the two fragments of the saucer which had given way under his impatient touch.

With rare tact, Janet suppressed her inclination to laugh at his crestfallen face. She was shrewd enough to know that the broken saucer was by no means Rob's only cause of trouble just then. Her experience of brothers had been limited to Ronald; but she was quite aware that, as a rule, brothers did not take kindly to rebuffs when their sole idea had been to caress their sisters. Day's gown was certainly dainty, Rob's hand wet. However— Janet's mind lingered long upon the word. Then she held out her hand for the saucer.

"Don't mind it a bit," she said carelessly. "My mother broke one like it, only yesterday. They are ugly things, and I shall be glad when

they are gone. But, truthfully, don't you hate doing this?"

He shook his head.

"Not unless I 'm in the way."

"You are n't, not one bit. It is n't half so horrid, when there 's somebody to talk to." She smiled, as their fingers met on a slippery plate. "Perhaps, if you beg very much," she added; "I 'll let you peel the potatoes for dinner."

Rob glanced at the floor.

"I 'd kneel, if I could and if there were room," he assured her. "It 's not such bad fun, Janet, and I get bored to death sometimes."

"Bored in Quebec?" she said, in mock rebuke, for the gingham pinafore hid somewhat of his elegance, the stick had been left, forgotten, on the kitchen table, and Janet was fast forgetting both awe and admiration in a hearty liking for her jovial assistant.

"Yes, even here," he assented, and something, possibly the lurking memory of Day's rebuff, brought an unwonted minor key into his gay young voice. "Your hills are too steep for my lame legs, and a fellow can't sit and look out of the window, all day long."

Janet hesitated, caught her breath a little, then, looking up at him, held out a welcoming and soapy hand.

"I know," she said gently. "I had forgotten. But, when you do get bored with looking out of the window, come down into the kitchen and play with me."

And their hands and eyes, above the cooling dishwater, met and pledged their friendship.

Day, meanwhile, up in her own room, was settling her hat and pulling and patting her hair into shape beneath the broad, soft brim. Her face, reflected in the mirror, looked anxious and a little overcast. Already she was regretting, to the depths of her soul, the swift gesture of withdrawal which had sent the colour rushing into her brother's cheeks.

During the past week, she had seen but little of Rob. That little, however, had been good and wholly to her liking. With a curious feeling of detachment, born of the years when they had gone their separate ways, she watched him, studied him and gave him her absolute approval. To Day's girlish mind, it counted for much that Rob was good to look at, tall of his age and robust, and without much outward mark of his year of suffering. It had taken Janet's keener eye to note the fine lines that came, now and then, between the straight yellow brows. Day's glance stopped at the brows themselves and at the blue eyes beneath them. Then it dropped to the clothes below, and

she made swift contrast between Ronald's well-brushed coat of last year's cut, and Rob's new winter outfit which showed that neither money nor taste had lacked in the ordering. In dress and manner, Rob Argyle was plainly of the class, and that at its best. His buoyancy and hearty good-will were all his own. Day watched him with unmeasured pride; but she talked to Ronald Leslie.

Once only, she had gone into Rob's room. The postman had brought a letter from one of his boy chums, and, receiving no answer to her repeated calls from the hall below, Day had mounted the stairs and knocked at her brother's door. She had found him, book in hand, but his eyes were absently fixed on the pair of little dove-coloured nuns passing in the street beneath. At her step, he roused himself, and turned to greet her with a brightening face.

"Oh, Day! It's you? Come in," he said, as he tossed his book aside.

"I brought up your letter. No; don't get up," she said hastily. "You look too comfortable to stir."

"My looks belie me, then," he returned. "I'm lonesome."

"Come down and stay with us," she advised him, for Mrs. Argyle had her own sitting-room on the floor beneath.

"Too much trouble to move," he said, as he stretched himself, then folded his arms at the back of his yellow head. "Stay and talk to a fellow, Day."

"But your letter?" she reminded him.

"It will keep. I am learning that I must take you when I can. You 're not going out now; are you?"

Day hesitated. During the past week, she had struck up a sudden friendship with an American girl whose people were spending a month at the Château. There had been some vague plans for that morning, and the morning was fine, all gray and gold and bracing. However, Day owned a conscience, and Rob's voice was wishful.

"Not unless you 'll go, too," she said, with sudden decision.

He shook his head.

"I walked twice the length of the terrace, yesterday, and I 'm lying up, to-day, to pay for it. Come and lie up, too." And, rising, he drew forward the most comfortable chair which the room afforded.

With mocking eyes, Day watched his hospitable preparations for her ease. When the chair was ready, —

"That 's beautiful," she said approvingly. "Now sit down in it and fill it up. It is entirely too large

for me. Besides, I prefer the window-seat; I like to see what is moving, you know."

"But it 's not comfortable," he protested.

"Oh, but it is. Truly, I like it, Rob. And then, this chair just fits you; you 're so nice and big."

"Is that the best you can say for me, Day?"

She laughed, while, with a flutter of skirts, she settled herself in the wide window-seat.

"Don't fish," she admonished him.

With an odd little air of irresolution, he still stood beside the chair she had scorned.

"I 'm not," he said bluntly at length. "It 's only that I have wondered once in a while just what you really do think of me, little sister."

For a moment, she sat looking gravely up at him, and older eyes than Rob's would have read the real pride and the dawning love in her face. Then, of a sudden, her gravity scattered itself, and a laugh chased the dreaminess from her brown eyes.

"You 'd better ask Ronald," she advised him merrily.

At dinner, that night, the coffee was unduly strong. When the clock in the hall struck two, Rob was still pondering the meaning of Day's words and of the look which had gone before them.

CHAPTER SIX

"DAY!"

"Oh, Day!"

The two voices, Canadian and American, one from above, one from below, smote the air simultaneously. Day, ruining her eyes and her temper over an intricate bit of lace work, looked up at the double call.

"Yes," she answered, without troubling herself to rise and open the door.

Again came the two voices, impatiently, this time, and one following close upon the echo of the other.

"Day!"

"Oh-h-h, Day!"

This time, she threw aside her work and went to open the door.

"Did somebody want me?" she asked.

Ronald, festooning himself over the rail of the third-story stairs, was the first to get in his word.

"I want you."

"What for?"

"It is Saturday afternoon," he said suggestively.

"Of course. Yesterday was Friday. To-morrow will be Sunday. What of it?"

Janet's brown head appeared beside the shoulder of her brother.

"It sounds exactly like 'April, June and November,'" she commented derisively.

But Ronald, albeit his arm went around her shoulders with a sureness of gesture which betokened long custom, yet ignored her comment.

"What of it?" he echoed Day. "Merely this: no office, and you said, last week, you 'd go out with me."

Down in the hall below, Rob spoke again.

"Oh, Day!"

"Yes, Rob."

"Were you coming for a drive?"

"Sorry, Rob; I can't. Take mother."

"She 's going out to tea. Why can't you go?"

"Because Ronald said I promised him, last week."

"Hang Ronald!" Rob observed to himself, a little too audibly for complete courtesy.

Day's head lifted itself proudly. Then she turned to face the rail above.

"Where do you want to go, Ronald?" she asked, and the distinctness of the tone held its own challenge to the boy in the hall below.

"Anywhere you say. What about the Island?"

"I 'll be ready in five minutes," she returned promptly.

"Then you honestly won't go with me?" Rob asked from below.

But Day, who had no notion how unused he was to begging for society, nor how it galled him now to do so, shook her head.

"Not to-day, Rob. I promised Ronald. Besides, it is his only day. We can go, any time."

"But you won't," Rob objected a little sharply. "You always have some excuse. Why won't you both come with me, instead?"

Day, who hated driving, vainly cast about in her mind for some graceful way of begging off. Ronald, however, went straight to the point.

"I 'm sorry," he said. "It 's good of you to count me in, Rob. I 'd like to go; only, you see, I 'm not getting any exercise at all, these days. I 'm not used to being cooped up at a desk, and it leaves me feeling anything but fit. I 'd best take my Saturday afternoons in the hardest exercise I can. Else, I would go with you. I know what a bore it is to drive out alone. I wish you could go with us."

"Thanks," Rob said, for the last words had come heartily.

With her hat in her hand, Day reappeared in the doorway of her room.

"Rob!" she called. "Rob!"

"Well?"

"Don't be cross; there 's a dear boy. And I was just going to ask why you don't take Janet with you."

Rob's eyes, passing Day's, moved upward to Janet, still leaning on the rail of the upper hall.

"Will you come, please?" There was a sudden eagerness in his tone, a sudden wistfulness in his eyes.

Janet, as she looked down at him, felt an odd little tugging at her throat. Then she hardened her heart. In reality, the invitation had come but indirectly and by way of Day.

"Thank you," she said, with a slight accent of finality. "I have some other plans."

Rob's eyes drooped. Then he said quietly, —

"I am sorry. I wish you could have come." And, turning, he went into the drawing-room where he stood by the window until Day's brown frock had gone out of sight and the crisp ring of Ronald's step no longer fell upon his ears. Then he dropped into the nearest chair and fell to pondering upon the value of active legs.

Janet found him there, when she came down the stairs, half an hour later, in search of events to amuse her. She herself was frankly bored, that afternoon. Ronald had urged her to go out

with him and Day; but she had shaken her head resolutely.

"I 'll go to the terrace with you, to-night, Ronald, and we 'll walk miles. This afternoon, you 're better off alone with Day. If I were there, you 'd think about things and, maybe, talk about them. Anyway, you would worry." And not all of Ronald's urging had been able to shake her resolve.

The things to which Janet referred were worrisome indeed, worrisome and imminent. At a family council, the night before, it had been decided that the Leslies must take in even more sail; and it was not easy to see how they could accomplish it. The new servant was a marvel of cheapness; the four Argyles were paying well for their pleasant home, and Mrs. Leslie had just been congratulating herself upon the prospect of a comfortable winter, when a couple of old debts turned up and demanded instant payment. To Mrs. Leslie's mind, loyalty to her husband's memory made it imperative that she should fulfil the demand. Long after Janet was in bed, she could hear the low murmur of voices from Ronald's room below. Small wonder that, this afternoon, she had felt that Day, care-free and energetic, was a better comrade for Ronald than she herself could have been!

Nevertheless, she was lonely and a good deal bored by being left to herself. Had the suggestion of the drive come from Rob himself, she would have hailed it with delight. It was quite another matter, however, to have Day arrange her plans and dispose of her for the afternoon, especially when Day was so obviously using her as a species of stop-gap. Janet regretted the need for her refusal, but not the refusal itself.

To her absolute surprise, she found Rob enthroned in the drawing-room, alone and apparently unoccupied. She had come downstairs quietly; and, for a long moment, she stood on the threshold watching him, without his noticing her presence. For fully half that time, she studied him with envious eyes, took in all the luxurious details of his dress, all the unconscious grace of his figure which so plainly betokened life in a family where debts were not, where one's bank account and one's ancestry were equally long and equally clean of origin. If only Ronald could have had those clothes, could have owned such ties and stockings, such wonderful, sheer linen as the corner which strayed from Rob's left pocket! But then her eyes fell to the floor, to the stiff line of the lame leg, to the stout brown stick, forgotten on the carpet at his side. After all and all in all, perhaps there was not so

much to envy. And Rob's eyes, fixed on the fire, were heavy and dull. Janet stirred a little. Then, as he did not heed her slight motion, she stepped briskly forward into the room.

"You here? I thought you had gone," she said.

At her voice, the light came back into his face, the alertness to his manner. He started to rise; but she checked him.

"No; please don't stir. I 'm not going to stay."

"Why not?"

Saucily she laughed down at him, as she halted beside his chair.

"I am afraid I might disturb your meditations. But I supposed you had gone to drive."

"No use. I 'm sick of driving alone, and you would n't go with me."

She flushed a little. Then she met his eyes steadily.

"You know why; don't you?"

"I imagine I do. Still, if I had n't been an idiot, I should have spoken first."

"You really did want me to go?" she queried rather wishfully.

Stooping, he picked up his stick.

"It 's not too late now. Let 's go."

"I — said I would n't," Janet objected lamely.

But already Rob was half-way to the telephone.

"No matter," he reassured her from over his shoulder. "That was another time, you know. Can you be ready in ten minutes?"

Janet laughed.

"I 'll scrabble. I am ashamed to give in," she explained. "Still, it is a gorgeous day, and it is a shame for you to spend it in-doors."

Ten minutes later, she joined him, hatted and furred to the chin, for the afternoon air was sharp with the snow which already powdered the blue Laurentides to the north of the city. For a moment before he opened the door, Rob stood smiling down into her face.

"Janet, you 're a good little fellow," he said then. "Come along."

Ronald and Day, meanwhile, were sitting on the top of the Cove Field steps. They had left the house, with the avowed intention of taking the Island boat. Once in the street, however, Day deliberately faced westward.

"Where are you going?" Ronald demanded, in surprise.

"For a walk."

"Sure. But the Island boat does n't start from the Citadel."

She flashed up at him a glance of scornful rebuke.

"I have been in the city for almost four weeks now," she reminded him.

"And even now you don't know your way to the boat?" he asked disrespectfully.

"I know it perfectly. I also know the way to Sillery."

"But I thought we were going to the Island."

"Not to-day."

"Why not?"

She hesitated. Then she gave frank answer, —

"Because you always insist on paying all the fares."

Her accompanying laugh took much of the sting from her words; nevertheless, Ronald, with the memory of last night's discussion uppermost in his mind, flushed hotly.

"Naturally," he said, and his accent was a little crisp.

"No; it 's not natural, either," she replied lightly. "It is all right, once in a while. I 'm a girl, and I like to be taken care of. Still, if we are going out together, every few days, I 'd much rather pay my own way."

As she spoke, she started slowly towards the gray arch of the Louis Gate. Ronald, perforce, kept step at her side. His own step was irregular, however, and lacked its usual rhythmic swing.

"What nonsense!" he said impatiently. "This is n't like you, Day."

"Then it would better be," she returned, and her tone was undaunted. "At least, it is good common sense."

"I fail to see it," he answered shortly.

From under the brim of her wide hat, Day peered up at him furtively. His tone was ominous. Her glimpse of his flushed face and tight-shut lips was not reassuring. Convinced that a fray was imminent, she swiftly decided that the best she could do, was to guide his steps to a spot where they could fight it out, unseen. The Grande Allée would be a bit too conspicuous a place for quarrelling.

"Let 's come out across the Cove Fields," she suggested. "I 've not been that way, since the first day I came."

Obediently he turned at her side, crossed the Grande Allée, crossed the bit of lawn in front of the skating rink and came out across the rifle ranges above the ragged earthworks to the west of the Citadel. Inside the city wall, the wind had blown sharply; but up on the deserted Cove Fields, the sun lay warm, and the river beneath matched the sapphire tint of the sky above.

For a time, they trudged away over the crisp, dry turf in a silence broken only by Ronald's

occasional nervous clearing of his throat. Then, as they neared the top of the endless flight of steps leading down to the river, he broke the silence, abruptly and with an obvious effort.

"Now look here," he said briefly. "Your mother put you up to this."

Most girls would have pretended to ransack their minds for an antecedent to his words. Not so Day, who preferred directness.

"No," she asserted. "She did not."

"Well, I wish she had," Ronald said, with some impatience.

"I don't see why."

His scarlet flush deepened.

"Because one hates a girl to be thinking of such things."

For her first half the answer, Day plumped herself down on the top step and drew her skirts aside to make room for her companion.

"A girl does think of such things, if she has any brains at all," she said calmly. "Do sit down, and we 'll talk it out, once for all. We may just as well settle this thing, first as last."

"I don't see any use in discussing it at all."

Her eyes twinkled, as she looked up into his lowering face.

"I do, then; that is, if we 're to go on having any good times together." Then she adopted a

new tone, half-cajoling, half-maternal. "Now, Ronald, do sit down in the sun, like a dear boy. I can't talk up to the top of a telephone pole. Arguments should always be on the same level."

"People should n't argue," he grumbled, as he obeyed her and seated himself at her side.

"They should n't; but they do," she retorted whimsically. Then she faced him, with steady deliberation. "Ronald, you know I like going about with you. You 've taught me all I know of the city; you 've made it wonderfully nice for me. Rob is very cross at me, because I like better to go with you than with him. No, listen!" She lifted her hand to ward off his interruption. "It 's not that I am not fair to Rob; but we both like the same things, you and I, exploring and taking good stiff walks, things he can't do at all. I 've loved the going out with you; it has been good fun. Still, after this, I shall do it only on the one condition."

He saw no need to ask what was the condition. For an instant, he sat with his eyes bent on the long line of shabby roofs at his feet.

"Suppose I won't agree?" he asked at length.

Her eyes met his eyes steadily.

"Then I shall stay at home, or else go driving with Rob."

The silence which followed was long, and broken only by the ceaseless trickle of falling shale which slid, slid from the face of Cape Diamond down into the gutters beneath.

"Are n't you a little hard on a fellow, Day?" he said then.

"Not a bit."

Sharply he faced her.

"Would you have said it, a year ago?"

"Of course. Why not?"

Again the scarlet tide covered his face.

"Money did n't count for so much then."

"What do you mean?" she asked, in some surprise. Coming to Quebec as strangers, the Argyles had gained no notion how sudden and complete had been the overthrow of the Leslie fortunes.

"Did n't you know that it is only lately that we have been — poor?" He flung the last words at her sharply.

"I did n't know you were poor now," she answered him.

"What do you suppose we take boarders for?" he demanded curtly.

"You don't; only us."

"Well, you, then?"

"Why, because — I don't know. Because Cousin John told us about you, I suppose."

Ronald snapped the head off from a weed growing up beside the steps. Then he laughed.

"I 'm afraid that would n't have been enough, Day. Did n't you know that — " The words stuck in his throat.

Day glanced down at the restless, strong hands, up at the clouded face.

"I don't know anything," she said slowly. "Remember, we are strangers here, and my mother is no gossip. Tell me about it, if you like; but not unless you do like."

Her voice and manner were full of a quiet dignity. In such a mood, Ronald had always found the girl at her best. Now he resolved to make a clean breast of the situation. Unconsciously to himself, his eyes cleared slightly, as he looked at her intent young face.

"Did n't you know," he asked steadily; "that we really and truly are poor now ? That we have to count and scrimp and save ? That, before my father died, we used to be rich, not rich for New York, but rich for Quebec ? "

Day started to speak. Then she checked herself, fearing lest she should say the wrong words. Instead, she bent forward and, for an instant, rested the tips of her fingers against Ronald's hand.

He interpreted the touch as she had meant it;

his eyes showed his gratitude. Then, after a moment, he went on, —

"I supposed you knew it, that day at Levis, when we talked about things. That 's why it hurt so, to-day, when you seemed to think I could n't scrape up money to take you to the Island."

"Ronald! What an idea!" she broke in impatiently.

"I suppose. People get queer ideas now and then," he answered. "I suppose I have worried till I am losing my grip."

"But what makes you worry?" she asked, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on her clasped hands.

His laugh plainly showed the effort which it had cost him.

"Dollars and cents," he said tersely. "We 've never thought about them, before. Now, with all our scrimping, it is going to be a tug to make both ends meet. I would n't mind, for myself. I hate it, though, for the mater and Janet. Sometimes I think it is hardest of all for Janet."

"More than for you?"

Proudly he raised his head.

"I don't mind. It is worse for a girl."

Day's thoughts moved rapidly from her dainty self to her no less luxurious brother.

"I don't see why."

"How would you like to wear cut-over clothes and a dyed coat, when you had n't been used to it; and to have the girls at school, not your friends, but the girls you never used to talk to, twit you because your mother kept a boarding-house?" he demanded hotly.

"Does Janet?"

"Yes."

Day pondered swiftly.

"I 'd thump them, and then I 'd cut them dead," she said at last. Then she faced Ronald once more, while the fire left her voice which grew very gentle. "I 'm sorry," she said; "I had n't any idea how bad it was, nor really that it was bad at all. Still, I think I am glad you told me, for it may keep me from making blunders in the future. But do you want to know what I think about things, money and all that?"

In spite of himself, Ronald smiled at the intentness of her tone. And she looked so dainty and prosperous, so absolutely unable, from her own girlish experience, to form any idea of what the lack of money really might mean.

"You think, the way I used to do, that it 's a mighty good thing to have?" he queried.

"Yes," she said frankly. "I do. We 've always had it, Rob and I, all we wanted and a good deal more than we either of us have needed.

I love it, love pretty clothes and journeys and having the best kind of servants and all the rest of it. But I don't think it 's the only thing, nor the best. I 'd rather eat boiled rice and wear cut-over stockings than not know my grandfather was a nice sort of man. And I honestly hope that, if my father were to lose his money to-morrow, Rob and I could grit our teeth and take it as coolly as you and Janet have done. I hope he won't. I don't want to have to be heroic. It would only be a comfort to know I could be, if it were necessary."

But Ronald shook his head.

"I 'm afraid I don't come in that class," he said.

As on one previous occasion, she held out her hand to his.

"Don't be too sure," she said. Then swiftly she brought the talk back to its point of departure. "Now about our coming out together," she went on, with a frank, off-hand directness which Ronald was powerless to resent; "let 's come straight to the point. I have my allowance; it is probably ten times yours. Anyway, it is more than I can spend, up here where there 's not so much to do. Let 's agree that, when we go off for a frolic, we each pay our own way. It does n't sound nice; but it 's much more fun.

We girls hate to be head over heels in debt. It 's a good deal that you 're willing to dawdle about with me and show me the sights. That you can do better than anybody else. But, for the rest — " She paused suggestively. Then she added, "Is it a bargain ? "

Ronald hesitated. Just as he was opening his mouth to reply, a shadow fell across them, and a languid, accentless voice inquired, —

"How do you do ? Oh, I say, did you ever get the poor chap out ? "

CHAPTER SEVEN

"QUEBEC is a queer place. I fancy there 's nothing else here like it."

His Baedeker propped open before him and a sheaf of paper by his side, Sir George Porteous sat in the writing-room of the Château, two days later, arduously engaged in composing a letter to his step-mother. His step-mother, who was also the source of future supplies, was fond of hard, concrete facts. Sir George bit the end of his pen-holder, while he conned the red-bound volume with intent and frowning brow.

"It is called the Gibraltar of America. Built on a high cliff over the Saint Lawrence, it is crowned with the Citadel. The soldiers are Canadians, and not at all swagger, like our Guards. There are several convents and monasteries here, and one meets a priest at every corner. Down by the river, there are shabby streets called Lower Town. Up on the hill, which the inhabitants call The Cape, there are two main roads and a lot of cross streets; but they all seem to lead to

the terrace or the Basilica. That last is the French church, two hundred and fifty years old. There is a university, too; but I have n't seen it yet. I fancy it has n't any boats."

Sir George drew a long sigh, as he laid down his pen and, leaning back in his chair, allowed his indolent glance to roam to and fro about the room, before it finally sought the terrace beneath the window and the broad blue river beyond. His step-mother was so fond of facts; and he had accumulated so very few of them, during the two weeks he had spent in Quebec.

Looking back over the two weeks, Sir George Porteous found it hard to account for the time. Two weeks! That made fourteen days, and there were twenty-four hours in the day. Of course, he had not kept awake all the time. No fellow could do that. He had had to do some dressing, and the meals had taken such a lot of time. Still, he had been out, every day. Really, he had walked quite a lot. Every morning, he had walked past the post office and the Basilica and down into Saint John Street to the florist shop. And, every afternoon, he had gone out the Grande Allée. Funny name, that, for such a little street! But everybody seemed to walk there. Vaguely he wondered what might be beyond the tollgate.

Suddenly his face lighted, and he picked up his pen, while the other hand, its index finger outstretched, trailed along the open page before him.

"Quebec was the scene of a famous battle. On the thirteenth of September, seventeen hundred and fifty-nine, the English climbed the cliff at the back of the city, and defeated the French outside the city wall. Both generals were killed, and now have the same monument on which my bedroom window looks down. This marks the fall of France in America. If Wolfe had lived, who knows —"

Once more he leaned back in his chair. This time, however, his long sigh of relief merged itself into an unmistakable yawn.

"Awful bore, this history!" he observed to himself. "I believe I 'll go out for a walk and see if I can't find out some more facts. It 's facts she wants, by George! The only question is how to get them."

Notwithstanding the fact that he had travelled for many months on end and in many climes, Sir George Porteous possessed a marked hollow where his bump of locality ought to have been. He knew the Ring as being the ancient *Place d'Armes* of the French epoch. He knew the long, straight road which runs westward from the Château wall,

and calls itself Saint Louis Street, or the Grande Allée, or the Sillery Road, according to its location in regard to the tollgate and the city wall. He had a vague notion that the Citadel was at the summit of all things, as befitted a British fortress; and he had another vague notion that all downhill roads led into a vast unknown and shabby area dubbed the Lower Town. Beyond these very finite limits, his local knowledge stopped short. And so it came to pass that, by the time he had made a dozen turns after leaving the Château court, Sir George Porteous was almost irretrievably lost. To his surprise, he met with unexpected difficulties in finding himself. When at length he accomplished that end, it was quite by accident and by strange and devious courses. That accident and those courses landed him all at once before a streetcar whose front was plainly labelled *Château Frontenac.* Behind him was a huge gray stone building, also plainly labelled, and something in the label captured Sir George Porteous's languid attention.

"By George, here 's a hospital!" he said. "She always did go in for hospitals, you know."

Pushing his hat far to the back of his head, he put up his glass and fell to ogling the massive front of the Hôtel Dieu, as though he expected its windows to open and a shower of little facts

to come flying forth, as if in answer to his winning glance. Nothing of the kind happened, however. The place was as still and deserted as the grave, save for a workman putting up a storm door somewhere in the depths of the arch. Sir George let his eyeglass fall, and compressed his lips until the wrinkles of flesh met above the heavy creases which ran slantwise from his nose to the outer corners of his chin. Then he cast a distrustful glance over his shoulder, to see if the streetcar were still in sight.

After the fashion of streetcars, it had moved itself out of the landscape. Its place was taken by a stout little Canadian pony that came scrambling around the bend of Palace Hill, its sturdy forelegs stiff and straight under the pull of its high, wood-laden cart. Another pony followed, and still another, their drivers seated astride the load, shouting and cracking their whips in a lusty chorus which reminded Sir George of something he had heard once in an opera. As if to verify the impression, he glanced up at the background of mountains, purple in the light of a coming storm, which ringed in the Saint Charles valley at his feet. Then, as the unmistakable buzz of an electric car came faintly up to his ears, he faced about again with a jerk. An instant later, the car came around the turn from the trestle,

and, by rare good fortune, its end also bore the reassuring label *Château Frontenac.* Sir George's brow cleared, and he relaxed the pressure on his lips.

"I 'm here," he communed with himself; "and I can't well lose myself, with the tram passing the gate. It looks the sort of thing she 'd like, and I fancy I 'd best go inside and see the place for myself. She 'll row, if I crib too much out of Baedeker, you know."

Once more and a bit distrustfully, he glanced back over his shoulder. Then for an instant, he showed signs of hesitating between the two means of entrance. A high, wide flight of steps led to the main door. A low archway seemed to give admission to the inner recesses of the place. Sir George chose the latter path, moved thereto, however, less by the instinct of exploration than by his natural indolence which made the steps look to him unduly high and steep.

The man working at the door sought to challenge his passage through the arch; but Sir George, giving him a card and a stony glare, prevailed and went his way.

"I must, you know," he said firmly. "I must see what 's inside."

Dubiously the man shook his head. Contact with many tourists had taught him to under-

stand a few words of the American tongue. Sir George, however, might have been talking in Cingalese, for anything the man could prove to the contrary. He shook his head; then he stepped back and Sir George passed in beyond him.

The archway opened on a square and grassy court, flanked on four sides by the building. At right angles to it, another arch, lower and much more ancient, pierced the wall and led into another court which was barred across by a high wooden fence. Sir George, straying aimlessly onward, came to the fence and, of a sudden, discovered that the fence was cut by a narrow door and that the door was slightly ajar. Modesty was not a ruling attribute of the life of Sir George Porteous. He pushed open the door and walked in. A garden was beyond, and beyond that another fence. On the west, a long, low wing of the building showed itself ; and, on the opposite side of the enclosure, a high stone wall shut off all sight of the outer world. Everywhere was quiet; everywhere was the mark of age-long peace. Sir George's step grew more alert. He had not counted on finding anything in America so ripely artistic as this quiet nook. He crossed the garden and laid his hand boldly upon the latch of the gate in the wall at the farther end. The gate yielded,

and he walked into the place beyond. Then he halted and stared about him.

"By George!" he said. "Oh, by George! How rummy!"

His chin raised, that his eyeglass might be brought to bear upon the walls around him, he still went straying forward, stumbling slightly over irregularities in the ground. Then suddenly he gave a violent start. He had been supposing the place quite deserted. It was most disconcerting to be brought to an abrupt halt by a hand laid on one's arm. The touch was gentle; but its gentleness held no hint of indecision.

"Eh? Oh, I say, what 's the matter?"

As he spoke, Sir George turned about sharply. Then he dodged back and made an ineffective snatch at his hat. Instead of the masculine caretaker that he had expected, Sir George Porteous found himself staring at a thin French face set in stiff folds of white. His eyes dropped, trailing aimlessly over the bunchy dress, the stout, coarse shoes and at last coming to rest upon the ground. Then he raised his eyes again. The nun's face was plainly accusing. Another nun, sprung up from somewhere, was at his other side, and, from across the courtyard, two more nuns, framed in an open doorway, pointed their fingers at him in ghostly admonition.

"Oh, good morning," Sir George said, as affably as he was able. "It 's a fine place here. I think I 'd like to come back to-morrow, you know, and bring a fellow to take some pictures."

The first nun shook her head.

"It would not be permitted," she said in French.

Sir George fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, produced his card and held it out to the nun. The nun stared at it uncomprehendingly.

"I do not wish a ticket," she said, in slow, halting English. "There is no admission here."

Sir George shook his head slowly.

"I know. Of course, you can't have any tourist fellows here. But Lady Dudsworth is interested in hospitals, you know. She is on boards and things, and she likes facts and — " Sir George suddenly felt an inspiration coming, and his tone grew more animated; "and I thought you could give her a lot of new ideas. It 's ideas, you know, she ought to have."

The nun's narrow comprehension of English caused her inability to comment upon the strange workings of heredity. Instead, her clutch on his arm tightened.

"Monsieur must go out," she said firmly.

"But I can come back?" Sir George's tone was charged with hope.

"It is impossible."

"Oh, but I must."

"No one is allowed to come here."

Sir George peered up at his companion, and his countenance expressed vague wonderment.

"But I 'm here, you know, and so are you," he protested.

"It is not allowed."

Sir George shook his head.

"But it is. Else, how did I get here?"

The question was unanswerable. The nun could only repeat her order for exit. This time, the second nun came to her aid.

"You must go," she said, with calm and spectral dignity; and, as she spoke, Sir George felt her hand, gentle, but viselike, shut upon his other arm.

For one long instant, he stood there, powerless to step and staring alternately from one to the other of the placid, determined faces swathed in their linen folds. Then he sought his glass; but, dangling just out of reach, it eluded his fingers. The clasp on his arm relaxed no whit of its steadiness. Then Sir George Porteous yielded to the inevitable.

"Oh, I say, I 'll go, if you want," he said hurriedly. "But are n't you a bit, oh, a bit exacting with a fellow?"

As he spoke, he took a step forward in the direction of the gate by which he had entered the court. To his surprise, the two nuns each made a step forward also, and their steps were measured to his with a mathematical exactness. Sir George made a tentative gesture with his pinioned arms. The gesture ended with the first inch of swing.

"Oh, you need n't trouble yourselves to come along, too," Sir George protested hastily. "I know the way out."

Without loosing her hold of her captive, the first nun paused to lock the gate through which they had come and to pocket the key. Then she faced forward again.

"It is necessary," she said.

"But I know the way quite well. It is only a step, you know, just around the corner to the street."

The second nun spoke.

"We will accompany monsieur."

Again Sir George made an almost imperceptible experiment on his arms. In response, the grip on either side tightened a little. Sir George lost his temper.

"Oh, by George!" he said testily. "You need n't take me all the way out to the street in this fashion. It 's beastly, you know. A fel-

low would think you thought I was watching my chance to break into your blasted garden and steal things."

But the grip held firm, and the silence was unbroken. And so, protesting volubly and facing one and then the other of his impassive jailers with irate glances which, however, lacked the compelling power of his eyeglass, dangling and clicking impotently against the buttons of his waistcoat, Sir George Porteous was conducted forth from the garden, a twentieth-century Adam in the unrelaxing grasp of a pair of Eves.

Breakfast over, that Monday morning, Day had stood long before her window, staring down into the street with unseeing eyes which took no heed of the procession streaming towards the post office and the business streets beyond. All the day before, as if to prove to Ronald how little difference their talk had really made, Day had watched his moods and fitted herself into them with the skill which came to her now and then. Ronald's face, overcast at breakfast when the memory of his late talk with his mother was still fresh upon him, had brightened by noon. Over the dinner table at night, it still wore the alert smile it had taken on during their long afternoon tramp out the Grande Allée and far into the country beyond. It was in a frame of mind dangerously near to

smug content that Day watched him starting for vespers at Saint Matthews in company with Janet. Then she turned away and entered her mother's sitting-room. She found Rob there alone; and, for the hour, Rob showed himself taciturn and glum. When Day put herself to bed, that night, her girlish head was full of the notion that boys were extremely hard to manage, and cranky withal.

The notion was still there, the next morning; but it was tempered with a hazy idea that, up to now, she had made no especial effort to manage her brother; that, rather than that, she had lavished all her care upon Ronald Leslie. To be sure, Ronald needed it more. Life was very full of disappointments to him just then, and no decent girl could sit by and watch his brave way of going without things he liked, and make no effort to fill in the gap. Ronald was such a dear, and so plucky. He answered so quickly to her efforts to cheer him up. It did seem as if Rob —

Three soldiers passed the window, their brief capes swinging in time to their stride, their diminutive caps poised insecurely above their right ears. Two nuns followed them, nuns whose dove-coloured cloaks showed that they had come from the Franciscan convent out on the Grande Allée. Then came a portly, scarlet-coated officer, and behind

him the Dean, stepping briskly along on his gaitered legs which offered trig contrast to the trio of black soutanes behind him. Day recalled her wandering attention with a jerk. Starting with the soldiers, it had gone, by swift and devious courses, around to her brother, now shut up in his own room across the hall. Perhaps Rob was facing some disappointments, too.

Day rarely was a girl of many hesitations. Now, opening her door, she crossed the hall and tapped lightly on the opposite panels.

"Come." The answering tone was indifferent, indifferent the eyes which looked up from the book.

However, Day was not to be daunted. If, as she shrewdly suspected, hers was the blame, then hers, also, the cure.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"Reading."

"What?"

"A book."

"So I observe," she said coolly, as she drew up a chair and dropped down at his side. "Look up, Rob, and tell me whether it is half so interesting as I am."

Her wheedling tone was not to be resisted. Rob's hand shut on her hair, then turned her head about, until their eyes met.

"Not half," he answered, smiling. "Now trot along and be a good girl."

"But I can't," she said. "It 's not in me." Then, obeying some sudden impulse, she reached out and took possession of his hand. "Rob," she added, with manifest effort; "I — I believe I 've been a good deal of a pig."

The book, sliding to the floor, was allowed to rest there, face down and a leaf turned edgewise, while Rob leaned back in his chair and faced his sister in astonishment.

"Why, Day, what 's the matter?" he asked her.

"You." The answer was accompanied by a laugh which threatened to become hysterical.

"I? What have I done?"

"Nothing. It 's I. At least, I have n't done things," she explained incoherently. "Rob, do you think I 'm very horrid?"

Rob Argyle possessed no more than his own due share of masculine obtuseness. Nevertheless, he was at a loss to explain Day's sudden outburst of self-reproach. Whatever its cause, however, her woe was obviously real. Obeying the sixth sense which comes, at times like this, to young fellows who have lived much in the open air, he put out his arm and gathered Day into its curve. To his surprise, he was conscious of a momentary nestling against his shoulder.

"What is it, Day?" he asked again. "Is something wrong?"

"Everything is," she made comprehensive answer for, like most self-reliant girls, once she gave in to her emotions, they swept her off her feet.

Over the top of her unconscious head, Rob smiled ever so slightly. He had had little experience of girlish woe. Nevertheless, he kept the amusement all out of his voice, as he said, —

"What, for instance?"

"I 've been off too much with Ronald."

Light suddenly began to dawn upon the dark places of Rob's mind.

"Oh, I see. You and Ronald have been fighting. Never mind, dear. Let him alone, and he 'll come round in time."

The words were wholly soothing. Not so the tone. Day raised her head abruptly.

"Ronald never fights," she said, with sudden tartness. "He is a dear." Then she rose to her feet, albeit a little reluctantly, for the curving grasp of Rob's strong arm had somehow carried her back to the memory of her little childhood which, a moment before, had seemed so remote and dim.

Rob looked up at her in surprise. As yet, he was wholly unable to fathom the workings of the

feminine mind. Slowly he rose and stood facing her.

"You 're not going to leave me alone in my glory, Day ? I thought you had come to stay."

She had meant to leave him at once. His accent broke down her sudden antagonism, however, and her step halted. Swiftly she went back to the first intention which had brought her to his room.

"I came to see if you 'd take me out for a drive," she suggested.

Gravely Rob looked down into her uplifted face, noting, as he did so, the unwonted gentleness which rested in her brown eyes.

"Fibbing, Day; or do you truly want to go ? " he asked.

And she did fib bravely.

"I do want to go, Rob. Else, I should n't ask you."

Apparently his scrutiny of her face satisfied him, for his own face brightened.

"Good child! I 'd love it. Let 's make it a walk, instead; that is, unless you 'd freeze at my pace."

"But ought you ? " she queried.

"Hang the ought. I 'll risk it, if you will. Everyone says it is bound to snow, to-morrow, and that will shut me up, tighter than a drum.

Get your hat on, Day, and we 'll take our last fling and forget the consequences," he said jovially, as he stooped for his stick. "These cabbies all turn the same corners and spin the same yarns. Take me into a new quarter, Day, there 's a good soul."

And Day, as she went hurrying away for her hat and coat, ransacked her mind how best to obey his behest. It was not too easy to explore new territory within the limits of a half-mile radius. Nevertheless, Day's mood was one of supreme content. Rob had ceased to glower, and her own conscience had ceased to lacerate her self-esteem. Moreover, Rob in his present mood promised to be a comrade second in interest to none.

Half an hour later, at the bend of Palace Hill, Day stood waiting for Rob to get himself down the steps of the car.

"Just a little way around here," she said eagerly. "It 's the sweetest place, endlessly old and picturesque. I know you 'll love it."

Rob, safely on the ground, started to reply. Then he held his peace and raised his head to listen to a faint and distant hail.

"Oh, I say! Come here, you know."

The voice was familiar, familiar, too, the wide-spanned *A*. Rob turned about alertly. The next

instant, he burst into a roar of laughter. Close at hand rose the massive bulk of the Hôtel Dieu, its front pierced by one wide archway. Out through the archway towards the street, protesting, vociferating, expostulating, his hat awry and his arms rampantly akimbo, there came Sir George Porteous. And, on either side of Sir George Porteous, clasping his manly arm with an iron, but nerveless hand, there walked a guardian nun, stern, impenetrable and wholly unrelenting.

From afar, Sir George spied Rob, hailed him as an old acquaintance.

"Come here," he iterated shrilly.

And Rob came, more hastily than was quite good for his lame leg; but Sir George manifestly considered himself in need of succour.

"What 's the trouble?" he queried, just as the two nuns, arriving at the end of the arch, let go their captive's elbows and stepped back into its shadowy interior.

Sir George looked helplessly at Rob, distrustfully at the nuns, made a tentative gesture to discover whether his arms were really free; then, finding that they were, he straightened his hat and grasped the string of his eyeglass.

"There 's been an awful row, you know," he explained then. "These — er — these ladies took me for a sneak thief after their fruit, or some-

thing, and they insisted upon putting me out. Really, they 're very strong ladies," he added reminiscently. "They must go in for a great deal of exercise, and that. I wish you 'd please tell them that you know me, and that I 'm not given to breaking into things."

But Day had come up to Rob's side.

"What about the fort at Levis?" she inquired unexpectedly.

Sir George faced around and stared at her in amazement.

"Oh, is it you?" he said dispassionately then. "Seems to me you are always about."

CHAPTER EIGHT

AS a matter of local loyalty, the Leslies had long since become life members of the Historical Society. As a matter of pure convenience and because it gave access to the only English library within reach, the Argyles had lost no time in being proposed for membership. And so it came about that the cozy little library was a familiar haunt to all four of the young people. Rob Argyle, in particular, had been prompt in assuming it as his own.

To Rob's no slight disgust, he had found that the fall of winter was curtailing even his narrow range of liberty to a most surprising extent. At their best, in summer and to active legs, Quebec sidewalks are none too safe. The insecure boarding, striped with wide cracks, the unexpected steps at the corners of the streets: these are gloomily suggestive of sprained ankles to come. Covered with the white frosts of autumn, they become dangerous; overlaid with a thin coating of hard-trodden snow, they are altogether deadly. For a week after the first snowfall, Rob managed to

reach the terrace in safety. On the eighth day, emboldened by his success, he attempted to include the post office in his morning walk. The ninth day he spent in bed, preaching prudence to himself and nursing his twisted leg. All in all, the past four weeks had showed a marked gain. He could not afford to lose it all, for the sake of being blown to an intoxicating sort of breathlessness on the wind-swept terrace. Towards night, he fell to casting about in his own mind for a new occupation.

He found it at the library. By the direct path along Sainte Ursule Street, the library was five minutes' walk away. It took fifteen to reach it on the cars which passed both doors. However, time was not valuable to Rob; and, morning after morning, he clambered out of the car, entered the low yellow building and mounted the single flight of stairs. Once inside the wide, warm room and divested of his coat and hat, Rob lost no time in possessing himself of a book and seeking the place he had chosen as his own, in one of the deep casements in the far corner of the room behind the card catalogue. Seated there, his lame foot in a chair before him and his elbows on his knees beside the open book, Rob lost himself to time and place, while he ranged up and down the world by the side of the explorers and adventurers whose

stories lined a goodly part of the walls. Reading had been an acquired taste for Rob. By now, however, owing to stress of circumstances, he had acquired it thoroughly. Had the chance offered, he would have stood on the poop deck by the side of Captain Cook. Chance forbidding, he would read of the experiences of the lucky fellow who did.

Without the resource of the library, Rob would have found time hanging heavy on his hands, that winter. Janet and he were firm friends, and, little by little, Day was creeping towards her old place in his life. However, they were girls, and talked about clothes and lacework and the way they did their hair. When he was with the two of them, Rob endured their chatter as best he might; but it palled on him and usually ended by driving him out of the room. Once out of hearing, however, he told himself that some things might be worse. He did not allow himself to be specific; but there still lurked in his mind the memory of one stormy night when Day, coming in all aglow with exercise, had taken pity on his loneliness and, dropping down on the rug at his side, had attempted to talk football to him. Rob's sense of humour had brought him triumphantly through the ordeal. Nevertheless, he saw to it that the experience should never be repeated.

As a general thing, Ronald and Rob let each other severely alone. Questioned, neither one of them could have given reason for the mutual avoidance. Both were well-born, well-bred. The three years' difference in their ages counted for little, since Rob was manly and self-reliant to a rare degree. They never clashed; they merely passed each other by on the other side. Ronald was unfeignedly sorry for Rob and showed it. He showed, also, a courteous tolerance for Rob's hobbies of whose charm he himself had no comprehension. He loved exercise; but he hated sports. American football, to his mind, was a thing to be classed with the bull fights of Spain. Rob's injury was one more proof of the theory he had always cherished. He pitied the injury, but he deplored its cause.

Rob, on his side, accepted the pity more because he was unable to help himself than because he was grateful. Judged from his point of view, Ronald was a nice, ladylike young fellow without the ladylike attitude of pretending to care for sports. Had chance not placed them in the same domestic circle, that winter, Rob would never have given a second thought to Ronald Leslie, save in so far as Ronald Leslie monopolized too great a share of Day's time and attention. Forced into a superficial semblance of friend-

ship, he treated Ronald with a tolerance which differed from that which Ronald accorded him in being easy and wholly careless. He totally failed to appreciate the real manliness of the young Canadian, the quiet pluck with which he had set himself to work to make the best of his fallen fortune. Now and then, however, his conscience did smite him a little, as he marked the unfailing kindliness with which Ronald looked out for his physical weakness. Rob hated being looked out for. Nevertheless, he could not fail to be struck by Ronald's constant heed of his comfort.

"And yet, do you know," he said to his mother, one night, at the end of a long discussion of the whole Leslie family; "good as the fellow is — and he is good, too — he gives me the feeling that he is best off, doddering about over a tea tray and holding yarn for people to wind. He 's a nice lady and a pretty one; but, after all, it is the old crowd of the fellows that I am pining to see."

And he did pine for them, too. At times, the pining was acute; but it generally happened when he was alone in his room and the door was shut. Rob Argyle was not the boy to let his voice get pitched to a minor key. His mother, watching him sharply, after the fashion of mothers, saw

the heavy drag of his foot and thanked Providence for the jolly twinkle in the keen blue eyes. At best, Rob's healing would be slow. It was something that his courage bade fair to outlast it. She rose, crossed the room and, halting by his chair, fondled his yellow head in an unspoken caress which Rob answered promptly and with interest. Their weeks together in the little foreign city were bringing mother and son into closer union than they had ever known until then. Mrs. Argyle was the one living person to whom Rob had ever confessed either pain or dreariness of spirit. And she was shrewd enough to know what, from a boy like Rob, such confessional was worth.

The raw wind, sweeping down Saint Louis Street, bit furiously at Rob's ears, one morning in early December, as he stood on the curbstone, waiting for the car to take him to the library. The gray sky, heavy with unfallen snow, seemed resting on the city spires, and the river, as he rounded the curve by the Château, showed itself a sea of chopping, white-capped waves. Even in the moment it took him to transfer from car to car, Rob was chilled to the marrow of his bones. No New England gale would ever have had half the cunning to discover the narrow crack between his neck and his high, close collar. He shrugged

his shoulders with a reminiscent shiver, as the door finally closed behind him, and the warm air of the library wrapped itself about him gratefully.

The place, as was usual in the mornings, was quite deserted. The librarian, busy at his desk, tossed him a cordial nod, as the familiar step sounded on the threshold. Rob halted to speak to him, halted again beside the table to choose a couple of new magazines, then crossed the room in search of his corner and of oblivion.

An hour later, he roused himself with a jerk and came back to his surroundings. Janet, powdered with snow from head to heel, had plumped herself down in the window by his side, and the cold drops, falling from her shoulders, were raining down across his sleeve.

"Hullo, Janet! You here?" Rob nodded and yielded her a few inches more of space.

"I came to return a book. What are you reading? Yes, we can talk. The librarian has gone, and there 's not a soul here but ourselves. Did you know it was snowing?"

Rob shook a small pool out of a hollow of his sleeve.

"I gathered the fact from your appearance."

"Gathered the water, you 'd better say." And Janet brushed him off remorsefully, then shook herself much as a Newfoundland dog might have

done. "Look out of the window," she bade him then.

Obediently Rob turned about. Then he gave a sharp exclamation of surprise. According to his wont, he had been too much absorbed in the printed page before him to heed the picture outside the window. Now he found himself staring into a white mist of whirling, eddying flakes which completely shut out from sight the row of buildings just across the narrow court, save when some gust of wind, stronger by far than its fellows, parted the flakes and drove them slantwise, to disclose the gray old walls beyond.

"I say, this looks wintry," Rob made comment, while there deepened upon him the sense of comfort gained from massy walls and a good coal fire. "If this keeps on, I 'd best be getting home." However, as he spoke, his figure relaxed once more against the wall at his side. "What have you been about, this morning, Janet?"

Janet laughed a little shortly.

"Fighting," she answered.

"Who now?" Rob queried.

His question was wholly jovial. Nevertheless, Janet read into it an implication that she was prone to disagree, and she answered crisply,—

"Day."

"What is the row with Day?" Rob asked still jovially.

"I think she is stuck up."

Rob closed his book and laid it down in the chair before him. Then he faced Janet with honest, friendly blue eyes.

"Oh, come now, Janet, Day is my sister. I can't let you go on talking like that," he said.

But not even her walk in the wind and snow had cooled Janet's warlike ardour.

"I can't help it, if she is your sister," she said, with a tartness which was rare with her. "If you did n't want the answer, you should n't have asked the question."

Silently Rob pondered the logic of her position and silently admitted its force. Then he asked, —

"But what has Day done ? "

"Criticized everything."

"Day is critical," Rob acknowledged grudgingly. "I 've come in for a share of it, myself, sometimes. What now ? "

"Us," Janet made terse answer.

"Meaning ? " Rob inquired.

"Us. All of us here."

"Leslies, or here in the library ? "

Janet laughed scornfully.

"Day never would criticize you," she said, and there was a slightly invidious accent upon the pronoun.

"Don't be too sure. Why not ? "

"You 're an American."

"Glory be!" Rob observed piously, but, as it proved, with injudicious fervour.

Janet flounced forward and put her elbows on her knees.

"There you go! You 're all just alike," she burst out hotly.

For a moment, Rob eyed her askance. Then he leaned back and clasped his hands at the nape of his neck.

"Feelings ache anywhere, Janet?" he queried composedly.

Up to that hour, Rob Argyle had never seen Janet, when she was really roused; he had no notion how far her irritation would go. Accordingly, he had made no effort to allay her rising wrath; and now he quailed before the sudden fire of anger that blazed up in her brown eyes.

"Yes," she said shortly. "They do. What is more, you are responsible for it, you and Day. I can't see what you should come here for, when you don't like us any better."

"Business," Rob murmured, almost too low for Janet's ears.

"Then you 've no business to slander us, when you get here," she retorted. "If you take the bread and butter we give you, you 've no right to talk against us, after you 've eaten it."

Janet's words were wholly figurative. Nevertheless, Rob made the blunder of interpreting them literally, blundered in his very perturbation, for it was beginning to dawn upon him that the storm within was becoming quite as fierce as the storm without.

"But, Janet, nobody could find any fault with the grub," he said hastily. "Both your mother and Marie are capital cooks."

She raised her head and faced him haughtily.

"Who said they were not?" she demanded.

"Nobody. At least — I thought — Day — " he faltered.

"Day!" An echo of scorn was in her voice. "And so she has been complaining of the food, too?"

Rob looked stunned by the accusation in her tone.

"But I thought you said — "

Impatiently she tapped her foot on the carpet. The fact that inadvertently she had blundered into a quarrel with one of her chiefest friends merely increased her fractiousness.

"Let 's not talk about it," she said shortly. "We only disagree."

Turning, Rob faced her steadily, a world of trouble in his blue eyes.

"Look here, Janet, what is all this fuss about, anyhow?" he asked directly.

"Oh, nothing. It is probably all my fault."

"That 's nonsense. One person alone never kicks up a row like this," Rob said firmly. "If I 've done it, I 'm sorry. If not, who has ? "

For some strange cause which lurked in the depths of her own conscience, his kindly voice, his steady eyes, his willingness to take his own fair share of blame only irritated Janet so much the more. Or was it that the irritation was directed against herself alone, and only wreaked itself upon Rob as upon the nearest victim ?

"I told you before who had done it. It 's you and Day."

"What have we done ? " Rob asked in amazement.

"Criticized us Canadians."

Rob's amazement increased.

"When ? How ? I have n't."

"You have. You do it, all the time. You say things, and so does Day; and then you look at each other and laugh."

Rob felt his own temper going. He caught fast hold of one corner of it.

"What sort of things ? "

Janet had risen now, and stood looking down at him, as he still sat in the wide, deep window casement. Even in his vexation, Rob was boy enough to be aware that never had she looked

better than now, with the scarlet flush in her cheeks, the angry light blazing in her eyes.

"All sorts," she made vehement answer.

"What?" he demanded no less vehemently. "It 's not fair to hint and dodge, Janet. Speak out."

"You said we took ourselves too much in earnest."

"Well, you do."

"You said it was a regular Sleepy Hollow."

"Yes."

"Day criticizes the clothes of the people she meets on the terrace."

"Well?"

"You make fun of our little street cars."

"Yes."

"You told Day, only yesterday, that you could n't find a this-year necktie in any of the shops."

"I could n't."

Janet's exasperation boiled over.

"Well, you need n't have told of it at the dinner table. How do you suppose it made us feel?"

Again Rob's temper lost itself in a sea of amazement.

"But you don't keep the shops."

"No; but my people do."

"Oh. Honestly, I beg your pardon," Rob said contritely. "The name and all — how could I tell?"

Again he had blundered. He knew it by the sudden lifting of her resolute little chin.

"That will do, Rob Argyle!" she said crisply. "You need n't imply that my family are in trade."

"But you said your people — "

"And I meant my people. I meant us Canadians."

This time, Rob lost his temper utterly.

"Hang it all, Janet, it would puzzle a Philadelphia lawyer to know what it is you really do mean," he said sharply.

She had turned away. At his words and his unexpected tone, she faced about. Even then, in the height of her anger, she felt a queer little tug at her heart, as she saw him stoop for his stick and then rise with the stiffness which still remained from his recent fall. Then she hardened her heart and, with it, her voice.

"You want to know what I mean? Well, I 'll tell you, and I hope you 'll remember it. We are Canadians here, not Americans. We have our Canadian ways, and we like them. We are n't big and busy and rushing like your New York. We may not be so fashionable; we may wear our clothes a little longer and not have so many of

them. We may not have such wide streets, nor such long cars in them. We may not be the least bit like the people you have been used to meeting in New York. We don't care, if we are n't. If we 'd been meant to be just like New York, we should probably have grown just as big and busy and fashionable. We are n't. We 're not New York, but Canada; and we are proud of being Canadians and of taking ourselves in earnest. If you don't like us, you can stay at home. For my part, I wish you would."

All the pent-up nervous energy brought on by the shock of her father's sudden death, by the need of adjusting her girlish plans to fit their changed conditions, by the daily and hourly wear and tear of work and worry, of petty snubs and open rudenesses: all this was pouring forth upon the tide of her own words. And, under all her excitement, she fully realized whither it was carrying her, realized it and regretted it. Nevertheless, for the moment, she seemed to herself powerless to stem the tide of her own anger.

Rob's next words, however, were somewhat of a check.

"Do you truly mean that, Janet?"

"Yes, I do," she snapped, wholly resolved upon sticking to her guns, now that they really had gone into action.

For a moment, as they stood there face to face, Rob looked at her steadily. His eyes alone showed his trouble. His lips were firm, although a whitish ring around them betrayed the fact that, heretofore, his life had been singularly free from scenes like this.

"I am sorry," he said then.

"Sorry for what? That you don't like us?"

"But I do like you, Janet," he interposed.

"Yes, when I amuse you. That doesn't keep you from making fun of us, behind our backs, though."

And then Rob's anger blazed.

"Janet Leslie, I 'll thank you to remember that I 'm neither a sneak nor a cad," he said, and never before in his sixteen years of life had Rob Argyle used that tone to girl or woman. Then the training of generations prevailed, and he checked himself. He turned to the window, and bent down to pick up the magazine which had fallen to the floor.

Slight as was the act, he was conscious of performing it stiffly, clumsily, and it was a moment before he was upright once more. As he finally straightened up to face Janet again, the clang of the doorknob told him that Janet had left the library and shut the door behind her.

CHAPTER NINE

THE clang of the knob brought Rob to his senses, brought him to a swift realization that he must not let Janet escape him like this. Since his infantine squabbles with Day, his life had been uncommonly free from quarrels of any sort. Nevertheless, he was quick to know that, between friends such as he and Janet had been, every minute that a misunderstanding is prolonged, increases by tenfold the difficulty of breaking it. Rob's own irritation had been short-lived, the irritation of a mastiff when a terrier nips at his ears. Janet had been cross, off her nerve. Possibly she was not feeling well, or something had gone wrong at home, that morning. Anyway, he could not afford to quarrel with the girl; they had been too good friends for that.

As fast as his lame leg would let him, Rob hobbled across to the door, opened the door and peered over the rail into the hall beneath.

"Janet!" he said to the silence. "Oh, Janet!"

But the silence vouchsafed no answer.

For a moment longer, he waited there in the chilly hall. It seemed incredible to him that Janet could have escaped. Then he remembered that he was not so quick of motion as he had been, and he shrugged his shoulders. Meanwhile, the air of the hall was as chilly as the silence. He returned to the library and put on his coat and hat.

"Party 's over," he said whimsically to himself, as he turned up his collar about his ears. "I may as well be starting for home." Then, as he glanced out the window by his side, he added, "Considering all things and the weather, I wish I were at home now." Then slowly, laggingly, he went down the stairs and out into the snow-filled air of the street.

For a time, he was so much dazed by Janet's recent display of mental pyrotechnics that he took no heed of the fact that the rails of the streetcar track were buried beneath an unbroken heap of snow. He merely stood there on the curb, his shoulders shrugged together and his back to the storm, while he beguiled the period of waiting for a car by wondering what in thunder he had done to put Janet's back up, and what in thunder her back was up for, anyway. Then a sudden and most violent gust of wind, swirling a handful of flakes down the nape of his neck, roused him to

the point of discovering that the car was unreasonably long in coming, and that the marrow of his bones was being chilled by its delay.

"I may as well go inside the door and wait, though they 'd never hear me call, the wind makes such an infernal row," he said to himself, with a backward, homesick glance over his shoulder at the yellow walls of Morrin College. Then his glance sought the track. "By Jove," he added; "do you believe the cars have stopped running?"

Again and more thoughtfully he peered through the falling flakes, hoping to see some break in the smooth white level of the street, some sign to show that a car had passed the corner within the last half hour. The white level was unscarred; no distant hum marked the approach of car or sweeper, and the wind was rising with every moment. Rob whistled to himself.

"Oh, come now," he said aloud. "Here 's a mess for a poor football cripple! What 's doing now?"

The roar of the storm was his only answer, and Rob was forced to set his own wits to work to answer the question.

Swiftly he vetoed the idea of going back into the library. In such a storm as this, there was scanty chance that the librarian would return.

No telling how long he might have to stay there, awaiting succour. And, if the fires went low? And, besides, he would need things to eat. Canadian beef might be tough; but, at least, it was preferable to book bindings. It was plain no car was coming. He could telephone for a cab, if he only knew where he could find a telephone. He tried to study the skyline, in the hope of discovering some friendly wire branching into a house near by; but the snowflakes, veiling the air, set his eyes to tingling with their impact and then, discovering the opening in the front of his coat collar, sought a watery grave in the warm recesses of his throat. He gasped a little, as he gave up the attempt and tucked his chin down in his collar again.

"No go," he said then. "Well, all right. I 'll have to trip it on the light, fantastic toe. Glad my mother is n't here, to hold up her hands in terror for her first-born son. She 'd throw a fit, if she knew what I am doing." And, pulling his hat still lower over his eyes, he started for the Ursule Street corner.

Janet, all this time, was sitting enthroned on a dusty heap of Mounted Police reports, waiting for Rob to get out of the way. Thoroughly ashamed of herself by now, she had no wish to meet his keen blue eyes until the memory of her recent bad

temper had had a chance to blunt itself a little. Her earlier disagreement with Day had been but a summer squall in comparison with the storm of her battle with Rob. And Rob, of late, had been walking straight into the king-row of her chiefest friends and cronies. Janet shook her head forlornly, as she recalled the glint in his blue eyes and the tawny red which now and then showed itself, when the sunlight struck across his yellow hair. She had been altogether abominable; she knew it now. Her penitence came as suddenly as her wrath had done. It was less sound, perhaps, for as yet she was not quite ready to speak out and tell how truly sorry she was. Instead of that, when Rob's opening the door above had caught her at the foot of the stairs, she had dodged away, out of his sight. Then, fearful of his following her, she noiselessly pushed open a door which chanced to be unlatched, crossed the threshold and, still noiselessly, closed the door behind her. The next moment, she found herself safe from pursuit, in one of the library vaults. Rob would probably start for home now. She would wait there, until he had had time to get safely out of the way. Then she would betake herself home by another path. She would make herself late for lunch; and, by dinner time, the whole fray would have passed into oblivion, and

she and Rob, under the combined eyes of their two families, would meet as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Bravely as she gave herself this assurance, however, in her secret heart she was conscious of misgivings. Suddenly and for no assignable cause, she had been volcanic. Under such an assault, even a worm would have turned, and Rob Argyle was no worm. It might be that his forgiveness would be slow in coming. At least, though, he was too much the gentleman to show his open hostility, and Janet knew his code well enough to be sure he would never tell tales to anyone but Day. The worst he could do, would be to let her severely alone. Janet sought to extract from that surety what lean consolation she could. And, after all, both he and Day did turn up their noses at Quebec. Only the night before, Day had made irreverent comment upon some newly-arrived wedding cards. To Janet's loyal mind, comparisons were wholly odious, save when the balance of credit was obviously upon the side of her own city. Still, viewed in perspective, a haughty disdain would have been a better rebuke than any amount of dudgeon. Besides, she was not altogether sure, now it was all over, that Rob ought to have been held responsible for the utterances of his sister.

In the intervals of her musings, she listened intently for the sound of Rob's halting step upon the stairs. The vault was chilly, and she had no wish to linger in it longer than was absolutely necessary. The roar of the storm, however, cut out all other sounds, and, measured only by its fitful gusts, she found it impossible to make any reckoning of time. She resolved to wait a little longer. Any physical discomfort was preferable to the ignominy of throwing open the door and stepping out just in season to face Rob, as he came slowly down the stairs. She could fancy the mirth which would come into his eyes as he met her, and her cheeks grew hot at the thought. Rather than that, she would stay in the vaults until the crack of doom.

Restlessly she rose and began to explore her narrow quarters, moved less by curiosity than by the chill of the place. Long decades back, the building had been the old prison; and Janet found herself now in what had been the outer court which gave access to the solitary cells. One cell was now given up to the furnace; another to a ragged pile of blue-bound government reports, while the court itself was partly filled with coal and lighted but dimly by one window at its farther end. And the base of the window, sunk below the level of the ground beyond, was

already covered with a light, white heap of snow. Janet crossed to the window and peered out, shielding her eyes with her hand, the while, as if to ward off the whirling flakes which clicked ceaselessly against the panes. Then she gave a little shiver of disgust. Born and bred in a land where winter attains its full perfection, a storm even such as that held no terrors for her. Her disgust was all for the lack of foresight which had led her to come out with neither umbrella nor overstockings, and arrayed in her best felt hat.

Impatiently she turned away from the window. It was stupid and dusty and cold in there. Rob must be gone by now. She had been in there for ages, and not even his stiff leg could consume such an amount of time in taking him out of the building. Anyway, she would risk it. She could dodge back again out of sight, if she heard him coming. Recklessly she crossed the room again and laid her hand upon the knob of the door.

Again and again she tried to turn the knob, twisting her slender wrists until they ached, throwing her light weight against the massy door and, the while, making little impatient groans of baffled energy. At last she abandoned the attempt, abandoned, too, the pride which heretofore had kept her in silent hiding.

The dusty old vault echoed with her calls for help. The roar of the storm, drowning her cries, mocked her with its fury just as, a moment before, the metal bar of a spring lock had made mockery of her futile girlish strength. Alone in the vault of the ancient prison, Janet Leslie was herself a prisoner, and the storm was the jailer who saw to it that her outcries should be unavailing.

Luncheon hour, that noon, found the Leslie house in a state of wild confusion. The midday gun, almost inaudible in the storm, had boomed out over the terrace before Rob Argyle, coated with snow from head to heel, had struggled around the corner of Ursule Street into the boisterous tunnel of Saint Louis. Twice he had slipped and fallen in the snow; three times, floundering along through the irregular drifts, he had wandered off the board sidewalk into the gutter. Tired, cold and aching in every joint and muscle, he reached his own front steps and, too chilled to seek his latchkey, rang the bell.

Day, passing through the hall, glanced up at the opening door. With a cry which summoned her mother to the hall, she dashed forward and dragged her brother into the house.

As a matter of fact, the case was rather serious.

As a matter of course, the three women made the most of it, and Rob was rubbed and dosed and packed into bed between hot blankets, before he was allowed to tell his tale. When at last he did tell it, it was brief.

"The blasted cars had stopped running, and I had to walk home," was all the account of his adventures that he deigned to give, and it was not until some days later and by way of a friend living on Sainte Ursule Street that Mrs. Leslie knew how full of suffering that brief walk must have been.

Two hours later, the house had regained its wonted calm, and Rob, his inner man parboiled with scalding hot tea and his outer man swathed in liniment, was beginning to regain his sense of humour. His mother, worn out with the sudden alarm, had retired to her own room for a nap, and Day, a bit of sewing in her idle hands, sat curled up in Rob's arm-chair, her feet under her, and her head pillowed comfortably against the angle of one of its wide arms.

"I wonder where Janet is," she said suddenly.

Rob laughed.

"In cold storage, we 'll hope."

Day rarely needed explanations. Now her response came swiftly.

"You caught it, too?"

Rob nodded, as he freed his lips from a mouthful of blanket.

"And the mischief of it is," he added; "I haven't the ghost of an idea what it was all about."

Day shook her head thoughtfully.

"Nor I. I suppose that is the way with us girls. Something goes wrong with us, and then we strike fire on the first thing that comes. I thought Janet was too quiet to be so spunky, though. Did you have a bad time of it?"

Rob turned evasive.

"It might have been worse, I suppose. However, I hadn't much to judge by. As a rule, Day, you don't make a row about things."

Something in his tone pleased her. Her eyes showed it, though her answer was careless.

"Possibly I don't care enough about things, in the first place."

"Nor people?" he asked.

"It depends on the person," she made elusive reply.

For a moment, Rob lay staring up at her thoughtfully. She was good to look at, this dainty young sister of his; and, for the passing hour, an unwonted mood of gentleness was upon her. Even in his exhaustion of the hour before, Rob had taken swift heed of her little cry of alarm

as she had caught sight of him on the threshold, of the deft gentleness with which she had helped him rid himself of hat and coat and overshoes. Afterwards, in the bustle of getting him warmed and anointed with liniments, she had been swift to see, efficient to act. Her brown eyes, meanwhile, had been only merry; and Rob had found her carefree expression a welcome contrast to the manifest alarm of his mother. The past year's experience had taught him to recognize the whole gamut of feelings that centered in his leg. He was perfectly convinced that the morning's adventure had wrought no serious harm. His mother, though, refused to be convinced. She looked worried, and talked about the doctor. Day, on the other hand, did what she could to allay his present aches; then she settled herself beside him, prepared to talk over the situation or remain silent, as might suit his mood. To Day's mind, Rob had never shown himself more attractive than in the stoic fashion in which he accepted both discomfort and dosing, accepted them and rose superior to them in all their ignominy. Her last pat on the blanket had been aimed straight down upon Rob's muscular shoulder, and she had smiled squarely into his eyes, as she asked, —

"Comf'y, Rob?"

Motionless as a cocoon, he had nodded up at her gayly.

"Can't help it, Day, with such a jolly little nurse. What now?"

"My work," she said. "I'll be back in a minute."

And Rob found himself counting the time, until her dark red frock reappeared around the corner of the doorway.

Both Rob and Day were surprised, when the falling twilight drove Day out of her chair to turn on the electric lights, surprised again when the bell for dinner sounded in the hall below. Then reluctantly Day rose to her feet.

"I'll bring yours up, myself," she said. "You don't want Marie upsetting things all over you. I'll gobble mine, and then come up and feed you yours."

"No hurry, Day."

She made a little grimace of disgust.

"Remember, I have no especial wish to sit long at the family board," she reminded him. "Janet may throw a potato at me, for anything I know to the contrary."

Rob laughed unfeelingly.

"Is n't she over her grouch yet?"

Day shrugged her shoulders after a fashion which unconsciously she had picked up of late. It was less elegant than expressive.

"How should I know? I've not seen her since just after breakfast. Then I went out of the room and left her talking. For all I know, she may be talking still. Be a good boy, and I'll be back soon with your dinner." And, with a mocking, mischievous gesture, she was gone.

Ten minutes later, she came back, bringing the tray, bringing, too, exciting news.

"Janet's not back yet, and her mother is worried to pieces," she proclaimed.

Rob sat up in bed and reached for his dressing gown.

"Steady with the tray!" he protested. "I don't care to have my fish swim off on a wave of soup. Where has Janet gone?"

"Nobody knows. She just has n't come That's the trouble."

Rob whistled.

"That's bad. What do they think is the matter?" he asked.

Day balanced the tray on his knees, then settled herself on the edge of the bed.

"They don't think," she said shortly. "They have lost their heads utterly and their brains have turned into cotton wool. Mrs. Leslie is sure she is snowed up in the street; but I don't worry about that. She 'd thaw herself out, unless she has cooled off a good deal since morning."

"Where is Ronald?"

"Tearing about like a hen with its head cut off. You 'd think Janet was a year-old baby, by the way he goes on. For goodness' sake, Rob, if I ever do get lost, do try to conduct yourself like a sane being."

Rob waved his soup spoon at her.

"If you ever do get lost, young woman, I 'll look for you at the nearest spot where they sell ice cream soda," he responded.

"You 'll have to go a good long way to do it," she retorted, as she took possession of his empty plate. "Up here, these people do nothing but guzzle tea. But how did you happen to mention ice cream soda? That was the rock we split on, this morning."

Rob picked up his knife and fork.

"I might have known," he murmured.

"Don't laugh. You know you like it, yourself. But you should see Ronald. He has been telephoning all over town, from the Hôtel Dieu to the jail. In the intervals of his telephoning, he rushes to the front door and stares up and down the street. The house is as cold as a barn. I do believe here 's Ronald now," she added, as a short, sharp knock sounded upon the door.

Ronald entered abruptly, abruptly cast his

question at the comfortable-looking pair on the bed.

"Have,either of you seen Janet?"

"Not since morning. Rob is better, thank you," Day responded calmly.

Ronald, in all his alarm, looked puzzled.

"Of course. Why not?"

"Nothing; only I thought perhaps you had forgotten to ask," Day made demure response.

"Shut up, Day!" Rob said good-naturedly. "Can't you see that Ronald has n't any time to fuss with us?"

Ronald gave a quick, excited nod.

"Not with Janet missing. When did you say you saw her?"

"This morning."

"When?"

"In the dining-room, after breakfast." Day slid off the edge of the bed and went to get the plate of fruit she had left on the table.

"That 's no use. My mother saw her after that. She was just putting on her hat in the hall."

"I saw her in the library," Rob suggested.

"When?"

"About eleven."

"Why did n't you say so sooner?" Ronald inquired, with a crisp ungraciousness of which he was wholly unaware.

"Because I had no idea that counted."

"Of course it counted. You knew she had n't been home since then."

Rob was in the peaceable mood which follows a good dinner. Nevertheless, he resented being assaulted and battered by Ronald's tongue. A bunch of grapes dangling in his hand, he leaned back at his ease and made careless answer, —

"No; I can't say I did. You see, I got busy on my own account, and did n't keep track of Janet's doings."

Ronald walked to the window and stared out into the street, then walked back again. His code of honour forbade his taking vengeance on a fellow in bed. Nevertheless, he would have relished the idea of pitching Rob, bed and all, out into the snowy streets.

"She was at the library?"

"Yes."

"Came away before you did?"

"Yes."

"You saw her go?"

Rob gave an irrepressible chuckle.

"I heard her bang the door behind her."

The dark red flush mounted across Ronald's face and dyed the roots of his hair. He controlled himself, however.

"How soon did you follow her?"

"As soon as I could get my coat on."

"Which way did her tracks turn?"

Rob pondered, for a moment.

"I don't remember seeing any tracks."

"You must have seen them."

"N — no. Hold on, though!" Rob straightened up abruptly. "I do remember noticing that the snow on the steps made a straight, smooth slant down to the walk. It would n't have done that, if there had been any tracks in — "

But already Ronald was half way across the floor.

"Confound you for not saying it sooner!" he said curtly. "Then of course she 's in the building."

"Why?"

Ronald halted on the threshold.

"Because she had n't come out."

"Not then. She may have come later, though."

"Sloane went in at twelve. There was only one trail out, at that time. We supposed it was Janet's. If you had only spoken earlier, you might have saved us all this trouble."

Rob, the grapes still dangling from his fingers, listened until the sound of Ronald's steps died away into silence. Then he settled himself at his ease.

"Well," he observed. "I do like pretty manners."

"I like the way he jumps to conclusions," Day responded. "He 's like a mad bull, when he thinks there 's something wrong with Janet."

"Poor little soul! It would be hard lines, if she 'd been shut up somewhere in that building, a day like this. I can't see why Sloane did n't find her."

"No matter. It will give her time to think of her sins," Day said tartly.

Rob shook his head.

"Rather more than she needs. Janet is n't usually a vixen." Then his compassion changed to mirth, as he added, "Ronald's progress will be easy, for he will set the snow on fire before him, if he dashes through it as he went downstairs."

Ronald, meanwhile, was making all speed to the library. Logic or no logic, Rob's words had convinced him that Janet was somewhere shut up in the building. The impression grew upon him, as he floundered through the half-cleared streets, mounted the steps and hailed the janitor whom he had telephoned to meet him.

"It 's I, Leslie. For heaven's sake, open the door!"

The heavy door swung open with a clang. The clang was answered by a shrill hail.

"Come! Come quick and let me out!"

"Janet!" Ronald's voice went up an octave. "Where are you?"

A thudding of fists on a door beneath the stairs showed him the direction he should take, showed him, too, that Janet's imprisonment had in no sense told upon her strength.

"Ronald! It's you! I'm in the coalbin beside the furnace. Let me out, quick! It's so dark, and I'm so hungry." And, as the door opened, she sprang out to his encircling arms.

"How in the world —?"

And Janet told him, told him with a prolixity of detail which completely concealed the main cause of her retirement, while she nestled in his strong arms and rubbed her crocky cheek against his own.

A long hour later, Ronald mounted the stairs at home. His anxiety at rest, his conscience became uncomfortably alert, and his conscience was sending him in search of Rob. To his disappointment, Rob's door was closed. Across the hall, Day's door stood open, and Day sat reading just inside the door. She looked up, as Ronald's step sounded on the stairs, and her face was severe.

"Is Rob —" Ronald began hesitatingly.

"Rob has gone to bed."

"Is he asleep?"

"I hope so. He was very tired and a good deal

worried. I hope he won't be disturbed," Day said sedately.

"Hang it, Day; don't be so hard on a fellow!" Ronald blurted out. "I know I was beastly rude to Rob; but I was half-wild about Janet, and did n't mind what I was saying."

And Day made serene reply, —

"Of course. We were worried about Rob, too, out in all that storm. But let 's hope the poor fellow is asleep. Perhaps we 'd better not stand here, talking. Good night." And she closed her door with every manifestation of anxious care.

Meanwhile, the "poor fellow," prostrate upon his pillow, was chuckling with ill-suppressed glee.

"Poor old Ronald!" he said to his enfolding blanket. "He 's getting his punishment now. There was no sense in his kicking up such an unmannerly sort of row, and I don't know as I blame Day for taking it out of him a little. Still, she 'd best leave a few pieces for Janet to pick up and put together. After all, the fellow is n't all bad." And, his mental amendments made, he turned over on the other side and drifted off into dreamland.

CHAPTER TEN

A TEMPEST in a teapot is a small thing, unless it ends with the teapot's boiling over and putting out the fire. In the case of the newly-kindled friendship between the young Leslies and the young Argyles, this narrowly escaped occurring. Civil war within the meagre limits of a single house is an impossible state of things; yet, in the days which followed the two storms, Janet's and that of the elements, the Leslie house achieved the impossible. In a sense, circumstances helped on the achievement.

On the night following the storm, the four young people went to bed in four wholly distinct moods. Janet was ill at ease, anxious about Rob, sturdily determined to brave it out and conceal both emotions. Ronald was penitent; Day was impenitent, and Rob was filled with an amused disgust with the whole situation. Had the four of them met at breakfast, the air would have cleared. Janet, however, was in her room with a most prosaic cold in

her head. Day overslept herself, and Rob was under bonds to lie still. As result, Ronald breakfasted alone with his mother. Then, when he went up to see how Janet was feeling, his step lagged a bit, outside of Rob's door. There was no answering stir from within the room, however, and he went on up the stairs. By dinner time, the frost lay thick on the surface of the talk.

For four whole days, Rob was invisible. It was the result of a compromise with his mother whereby, if she would forego a doctor, he would agree to captivity and the pungent aroma of liniment. He rebelled the less at his captivity, because walking was a painful operation just at present, and because Day's accounts of the glacial atmosphere below stairs failed to attract him, to the point of making him repine at the thought of being out of it all.

In the meantime, he and Day were fast becoming the best possible chums. Day, on her dignity by reason of Janet's outbreak and Ronald's curt rudeness to her brother, had taken council with her girlish mind and decided that the blame was entirely theirs; that, moreover, the best way to bring them to terms was to signify that her own good times were complete without them. Accordingly, she took care to see them only at their meals. Much of the remaining time she

spent with Rob, moved thereto less by devotion to Rob than by the desire to emphasize the difference in her attitude to the different members of the household. When she did meet them, she was perfectly polite, but in a frigid fashion that was far more cutting than open discourtesy. In return, Janet sniffed and said she did n't care. Ronald, however, took it more seriously. He had grown genuinely fond of Day, and he missed her hearty, happy comradeship far more than he liked to confess.

A good deal of this complex mingling of tempers drifted up into Rob's room. He laughed at Day's shrewd comments upon the existing order of things; but, at the back of his brain, he was decidedly of the impression that all four of them deserved to be spanked and put to bed without their suppers. Such a wholesale family jar was neither dignified nor decorous. Volcanic in its origin, it was reaching a point where nothing short of an earthquake could break it up, and Rob hated earthquakes. As a matter of course, he had had no glimpse of Janet. Ronald, on two occasions, had stopped at his door with a wholly dutiful inquiry for his health. Rob's answer had been soft; but it had been coupled with a strong desire to throw a footrest at Ronald and observe the way he took it.

"Confound him! He need n't put on his funeral voice, when he talks to me," he had exploded to Day, on the second of these occasions. "I 'm mentally sound, if I can't do things. I wish he 'd oil his boots and get the squeak out of them, before he comes again."

In regard to Day's sudden access of devotion, Rob had no hallucinations. He knew that her motives were not unmixed. Nevertheless, he was resolved to take his good times when he could get them, and ask no questions. And they were good times, too. More and more Rob was learning to delight in his young sister. He liked her bright self-reliance, her fun, her shrewd young judgment; he liked her swift, sure motions; he liked her pretty clothes. All these details attracted him and won his full approval. But when, now and then, one of her rare, sweet moods of gentleness was upon her, the liking yielded its place to a whole-souled love such as only a healthy-minded boy can give. As a rule, Day perched herself in the deep windowseat and chattered nonsense by the yard. Now and then, though, usually while the twilight was darkening over the room, she left her windowseat and came to sit on the floor at his side, her head nestled against the chair and one slim arm resting across his knee. And Rob, his hand on her shoulder, cuddled it a bit now and then, while

the talk rambled on fitfully, or dropped into fitful silence. It was always an unwelcome break, when Marie came in with the tray.

At first, they had talked only of the present, of the things they had already done, or still were planning to do, that winter. Then by degrees the talk went trailing back into the past when Rob was delighted to find Day's memory as good as his own for all the trifling details of their childhood. Or it wandered on into the future, and they surprised themselves and each other when they found how far the plans of each were changing to include the other. And then, just before Marie came in on the last night of Rob's captivity, some sudden mood led Rob to speak of the way, all the previous winter and spring, he had been conscious of missing the real Day out of his life. And Day's only answer had been the laying her cheek upon her arm as it rested in its usual place across Rob's knee. They both had blinked a little, when Marie, without warning, had switched on the electric light.

Once Rob was downstairs again, the situation showed no signs of mending. For no assignable cause, Ronald had clambered up on his dignity and had hoisted up Janet with him. Rob was swift to see how insecurely they were poised, and on what a tottering foundation; and he lost

no opportunity to upset their balance. It was impossible to resent the bland good humour of his conversation which showed an astounding agility in skating out upon thin ice, and then dodging backwards, just as the ice began to crack.

"Mrs. Leslie, what are we going to do with those bad children of ours?" Mrs. Argyle made direct question, one night.

Mrs. Leslie shook her head.

"I wish I knew," she answered.

"Do you think we 'd better interfere?"

"Sit down." Mrs. Leslie pushed forward a hospitable-looking chair. "I really wish I knew," she reiterated musingly. "What do you think?"

Mrs. Argyle took possession of the chair, arranged herself at her ease, gave a prolonged look at the coals in the grate, then, turning, gave another prolonged look into the face of her companion.

"I 'm afraid of making it worse," she said then. "Of course, for us looking on, it could n't be much worse; but it could be more permanent. I don't want that. I 've watched your children closely; I like to have Rob and Day with them. I really think I have felt worse than anyone else about the trouble."

Mrs. Leslie lifted her eyes from her work and slightly shook her head. Like Mrs. Argyle, she

too had been making her own observations, the past two months. She liked the Argyle children; more and more, also, she liked the Argyle children's mother. Mrs. Argyle was not by any means the wayward, superficial society woman that Mrs. Leslie had judged her at first sight. Living in one house, the two women had drifted into no semblance of intimacy. Nevertheless, they were conscious of a growing admiration, each for the other.

"I suppose," Mrs. Argyle continued thoughtfully; "the best thing for me to do, would be to take the children into another home. Still, I dislike the idea; it seems too much like running away from a difficult situation. If you feel that you can endure it a little longer, Mrs. Leslie," as she spoke, she looked up once more; "I should like to stay and face the matter out."

Mrs. Leslie's needle had unthreaded itself. It was taking all her attention to thread it again, and the droop of her head concealed the consternation in her eyes. Boarders were not plenty in Quebec at that season; and one's coal bill and one's account with the butcher must stand before mere questions of injured dignity resulting from childish tiffs and misunderstandings. Nevertheless, Mrs. Leslie's low voice was full of dignity, as she answered, —

"I should dislike to have you go away, Mrs. Argyle."

Mrs. Argyle leaned back in her chair.

"I am glad. I dislike the thought of a change," she said heartily. "We all like the dear old house. And I think the children will come to terms in time. Anyway, Rob has to go back to New York, after the holidays."

"To stay ? "

"Only for a week or two. He was to have gone in February; but this last strain makes me a little uneasy, and I 'd rather he went at once. We 've compromised on the day after Christmas. He and Day both wailed at the idea of being parted on that day."

"What good times they have together! " Mrs. Leslie said thoughtfully. "They seem peculiarly intimate."

"No more so than Janet and Ronald. But about this trouble: I could speak to the children, Mrs. Leslie. Sometimes, I think I ought. Still, there 's nothing I can put my finger on. They are desperately polite to each other. Besides, there is always the chance of changing armed neutrality into open war. Rob has more than a dash of red in his hair, and Day's temper is n't of the most quiet sort. I really wish you would advise me. It is so hard to act, when I

have n't any notion of the cause of the fray, nor where the first blame lies."

Mrs. Leslie looked up sharply.

"Don't you know, either ? " she asked.

"No. Don't you ? "

"Not at all."

"Has n't Ronald talked it over with you ? "

"Not he. Ronald thinks a good deal more than he talks."

"But I thought you were so intimate."

"So we are. Still, in a case like this, Ronald shuts his mouth, all the more when Janet is in it, too. But your children ? "

"Have never mentioned it; that is, to me. Of course, I know they talk it over together. Once or twice, when I 've been in the next room, I have caught just a word."

"Why don't you ask them ? " Mrs. Leslie queried.

For a moment, Mrs. Arygle looked at her in surprise. Then she said quietly, —

"I 've never been used to teasing for the confidence of my children. If I am the mother I ought to be, they will tell me anything I ought to know. For the rest, they have the same right to their secrets that I have to mine." Then, smiling, she rose and held out her hand. "The truth is, Mrs. Leslie, I suspect this matter is some-

thing we are powerless to touch. If we can hold our peace and keep our own heads level, time will do the rest. Meanwhile," she laughed lightly; "meanwhile, the peace commission will have to adjourn, until it gathers up a few facts of the case. At least, it is a comfort that you are not longing to turn my quarrelsome children out of your house."

Day, in the meantime, had been finding the past week rather a drag. During Rob's imprisonment, she had spent a large share of her time with him. She had enjoyed him absolutely, had almost regretted the ending of her monopoly of his time and attention. Nevertheless, she already was feeling the effects of her unwonted lack of out-door exercise. Her girlish humour suffered; she was languid, and, now and then, irritable. At the end of a week of sitting about the house, however, her mother interfered and ordered her out into the snow-crisp air. It was then and for the first time that Day suddenly came to a realizing sense of how much she missed the Leslies. It was too cold for much driving. At best, Rob's walks were of the briefest; and now they were curtailed to the extent of the width of the sidewalk. Under such circumstances and other conditions, Day would have thrown herself upon the society of Janet and Ronald. Under the present

conditions, she was driven to seek the alternative of faring forth alone.

After one day when it seemed to her that she was the only solitary person upon the length of the Grande Allée, after a day when only her own shadow kept her company upon the thronged and sunshiny terrace, Day resolved to abandon those two main pleasure grounds and betake herself to the byroads where her lonesomeness would arouse less comment. Accordingly, she formed the habit of making a daily tour of the Ramparts, down Palace Hill and up the Côte d'Abraham, not from any especial interest in the antiquity of the route; but because it filled the allotted time her mother had ordained for her exercise. To Day's present frame of mind, it mattered nothing that Montcalm's house still stood upon the Ramparts; that the Côte d'Abraham was the scene of the disordered retreat of the French Regulars from the battlefield outside the city wall. It scarcely mattered, even, that the distant Laurentides stood up and out, a dark blue ring around the dazzling, snow-heaped levels to the north and west of the city. For the time being, the girl was heartily sick and tired of Quebec and of all that it contained. She longed for her own home city, for her own home friends, for American food and for the American sense of humour. Her father's busi-

ness interests were dragging themselves out interminably; and Mrs. Argyle, modern wife and mother that she was, yet held to the old-fashioned notion that, in so far as possible, a wife should keep in touch with her husband. For the sake of that notion, she was willing to put up with a winter in the sleepy, foreign little city, on the chance that now and then Mr. Arygle might be able to spend a leisure day at home. Day, however, had neither a husband nor a notion. With all her heart, she envied Rob his dreaded trip to New York. Nevertheless —

She shook herself and glanced out over the distant hills. Nevertheless, given her choice between the States and Rob, she would never hesitate. And Rob was here, not in the States. The only trouble was that there were no more Robs in the world.

"Oh, good morning. How do you do again?"

Yielding to a sudden wave of despondency, Day had halted on the bastion above Dambourges Hill, and, her elbows on the wall and her chin on her muff, she had stood long, staring out across the gleaming flats beyond. She started abruptly, as there came up to her ears the unmistakable voice and accent of Sir George Porteous.

"Where are you?" she demanded, when a hasty glance had revealed the fact that both bastion and hill were empty of straying Englishmen.

"Here." The voice was minor and altogether pitiful. It appeared to be disembodied, however. It came from beneath; but Day, craning her neck over the wall, was totally at a loss to discover the wrinkle-bordered lips from which that voice should properly have come.

"Where is *here?*" she asked in amazement.

"Here. Where I am, you know."

"Where is that?"

"On the steps."

Hurriedly Day crossed to the side of the bastion and looked down. Up the steep flight of steps Sir George Porteous was toiling painfully. His own steps were impeded by one single snowshoe which, dangling loosely by its thong, had worked around until it lay on the top of his foot where it clattered protestingly against the stairs. The other snowshoe was in his hand; and his back was coated thickly with hard-packed snow, save for one point where a mire-encrusted shoulderblade bore witness to an ungentle meeting with the sunny roadway, a witness which was corroborated by the unseemly condition of Sir George's stiff black hat.

For an instant, Day held her breath in mingled terror and hilarity. Step by step, Sir George came stubbing towards her, his free foot first, followed by its hampered comrade, and the arrival

of the second foot upon each stair was accompanied by a look of anxious doubt, a tentative shifting of weight, a sinking to the level and a deep sigh of satisfaction. At length, Day gained control of her voice.

"Why don't you take off your shoe?" she called down, over the edge of the wall.

"I did n't need. It came."

"Yes. But the other?"

"The fellow tied it on too tight." And, lifting his foot, shoe and all, Sir George clung to the rail and gave a skittish little kick, in support of his statement. According to the unreliable custom of its kind, the snowshoe came off and went bouncing and thudding down to the bottom of the steps. Sir George, still on one leg and clasping the rail with both scarlet-mittened hands, peered after it ruefully. "Oh, by George!" he said. Then, as it came to rest not far from the foot of the hill, he lifted up his voice. "Oh, down there! Oh, some fellow, please bring me my shoe!" And, regardless of the fact that the hill was empty, he sat himself down on the step and prepared to await the return of his missing property.

"Why don't you sit on the other shoe?" Day suggested from above.

Without stirring otherwise, Sir George screwed his head about, until he faced her.

"Oh, I won't let that get away. I am holding it quite fast."

"Yes; but the steps are so cold," she urged.

"Of course. It 's the snow, you know. But the snowshoe leaks," he explained lucidly. "Have you been away, since I saw you last?"

"No."

"Strange that I have n't seen you. You always used to be about. Have you learned to walk on snowshoes?"

"Not yet. You must be very skilful, to attempt such a hill as this," Day said politely.

"Oh, I found it was the only way, you know. The man in the shop told me I 'd best go out to the Cove Fields; but I could n't seem to make them walk on a level, so I hunted out the steepest spot I could find. I thought they 'd go all right, once they were started."

"I see." Again Day's mirth threatened to overwhelm her. "And did they?"

"They went all right. The only trouble was, they would n't stop going, when I wanted. Took the bits and bolted, you know. When they did stop, one had come quite off." And Sir George made an effort to rub his shoulderblade reminiscently. Then he added, "I think the fellow could n't have known just how to tie them on."

"What fellow?"

Sir George stared up at her blankly.

"I 'm not sure. He did n't tell me his name. The fellow at the top of the steps."

"Oh, I understand. You mean that somebody, some stranger, helped you put them on?"

"Yes. How else? I could n't make them walk all the way out from the hotel," Sir George explained testily.

Day gave him a comprehensive glance which included both his injured hat and his damaged shoulderblade.

"No; I should imagine not," she assented.

Sir George cast an uneasy eye down the hill.

"I wonder how I 'll get my shoe," he said helplessly.

"Go down and get it." Day's tone was unsympathetic.

"But I 've only just come up. I was down there, when I saw you first. I did n't like to call out, though, even when I knew it was you. I was afraid you 'd jump and fall, you know."

"Thank you." Day measured the height of the four-foot wall with her eye. Then she buried her face in her muff. "Excuse me. I was just warming my nose," she said discursively at length.

"How rummy! Don't you think my mittens would be just as good?"

"To warm my nose?" Day queried blankly, for Sir George's meaning was opaque to her.

"No; for mine. It 's very cold. In fact, you know, it 's very cold to be sitting here." Sir George chafed the tip of his blue nose with one scarlet mitten and then the other. "I bought them at Renfrew's, when I got my shoes," he added, with seeming irrelevance. Then he fell to massaging his nose again.

For a long moment, Day once more sought the shelter of her muff. Sir George's voice recalled her.

"I say?"

"Well?"

"Oh, I say, I 've just come up this hill. It 's a real brute of a hill, and it 's quite knocked me out. You 're quite fresh; are n't you?"

"Quite," Day assented, for, as yet, she had no notion whither Sir George's fertile brain was leading.

"That 's what I thought. You look it, you know. And I 'm so very tired. Would you mind just stepping down and bringing me my shoe?"

And Day went. She would have gone ten times that distance, for the sake of carrying home to Rob the story of her going. Sir George watched her tranquilly as she went slipping and

sliding down the steep slope, crawling and clambering up again. Breathless and with the shoe in her hand, she reached his side. Smiling and with his battered hat in his hand, he rose to greet her.

"Thank you so much," he said affably, as he held out his unoccupied mitten for his missing footgear. "I 'm sure you are very kind. When you get your own shoes, let me know about it, and we 'll go out for some walks together. You 'd find it much safer, you know, than starting out to walk alone." And, settling his hat on his head with an anxious care for its balance, he clasped a shoe under either arm and started up the steps, leaving Day to follow or not, as she might choose.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"WHERE now, Ronald?"

Ronald, in dinner coat and spotless tie, had halted before his mirror for one last brushing of his thick, dark hair. His door stood ajar, and Janet's face was in the crack. At her question, he sent her a welcoming smile by way of the glass.

"It 's the office dinner, to-night, you know."

Also by way of the glass, Janet sent him a wry face. Then she accepted the welcome and, pushing open the door, entered the room.

"How can you go to that thing?" she asked disdainfully.

"How can I help it?"

"Stay at home. There will be all sorts of stupid people there," she said, as she crossed the room and stood staring into the mirror with obvious satisfaction in the rich, dark beauty of the pictured face.

"I can't well get out of going. The chief wouldn't like it."

"Why not?"

"He counts a lot on this annual dinner of his. Says it makes us better acquainted."

"But you don't want to get better acquainted," Janet said sagaciously.

"No; I can't say I do," Ronald made honest confession. "I like to pick my own friends. Still, one can't stand out on a matter like this."

"I don't see why."

"Because, next time, I 'd be left to sit it out alone, either in the office, or outside." Ronald laid down his brushes and gave one final tweak to his tie. "Besides," he added then; "one or two of the fellows are n't so bad; and, if it comes to that, there are stupid people here."

Swiftly Janet made a face at the opposite wall.

"Even in this house?" she queried, in a whisper.

Ronald laughed. Then he nodded. However, Janet promptly disagreed with the ground that she herself had taken.

"And they are n't stupid, either, only pesky," she said thoughtfully. "Yes, brother, I mean just *pesky*. It 's not slang, only a dowdy old word that most people are too fashionable to use; but it fits some people to a *T*." Resting one elbow on the dressing-table, she arranged the ebony-backed brushes to her liking, rubbed her finger across

and across their intricate monograms, and then glanced up once more. "I wonder which is worse: to be just pesky, or downright bad?" she added. "For my part, I'd rather get on with the bad ones. You can generally tell what they will do next; but Rob and Day —"

Silently Ronald pointed to the opposite wall. Janet's voice was rising to the danger limit.

"People catch their own names, when they can't hear anything else," he explained. "I really don't think Day is in her room, though."

But Janet had cast herself down on the bed.

"Oh, I do want to see Sidney," she said. "She always made things go right."

Turning his back to the mirror, Ronald sat down on the edge of the low dressing table and fell to swinging one foot to and fro.

"The thing I can't understand, is what set them going wrong in the first place," he said meditatively.

Janet cast one swift, shrewd glance up at him; then she lowered her eyes. Until that moment, she had supposed that Ronald was in possession of all the facts, that his loyalty to her arose from approval, not from ignorance. Again and again the two Leslies had discussed the hostility of the two Argyles, but in such general terms that never once had it dawned upon Janet that her

brother might be lacking the clue to the entire situation. Granted that he held it, no need to discuss it. Penitential thoughts came easily to Janet; not so, penitential words. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether, loving and trusting Ronald absolutely, she could so long have kept him in ignorance of her leading share in the general catastrophe, had she not taken it for granted that he was already in possession of it in all its details. From certain utterances of Ronald, she had gathered the fact that sparks had flown freely between himself and the Argyles, just before he had dashed out to her rescue. Quite as a matter of course, Janet had assumed that Day had spoken to her discredit and that Ronald had resented Day's tale. Under such conditions, it was scarcely to be wondered at that Janet, knowing the real truth of any charges Day might bring, should prefer to maintain a sturdy reticence regarding them. Discussion would lead to an inevitable acknowledgment that she was indefensibly in the wrong.

"Then you really don't know what is the matter?" she asked slowly.

And Ronald made despairing answer, —

"No; I 'm blest if I do."

For an instant, Janet started to speak. Then, as her eyes fell to the little watch that dangled

from its pin, she checked the impulse. Inside of ten minutes, Ronald must leave the house; and her own accountability for the present state of war could never, she felt, be properly discussed within the narrow limits of ten minutes. Instead, —

"Do you care?" she asked flippantly.

"Yes," Ronald said honestly; "I do care a long way more than I like to own."

Janet gave a sniff of unalloyed hostility.

"I don't," she said mendaciously.

"I miss them; at least, I miss Day," Ronald said slowly, and, as he spoke, his face clouded.

"I don't," Janet repeated.

In spite of his trouble, Ronald smiled.

"Nor Rob?" he queried.

"Not when I have you," she retorted.

"But you used to have us both."

"Not so much as you might think. There was always Day, you see."

"I don't see what she had to do with it."

"Oh!" Janet's tone was conclusive. "You don't."

And there came an interval of silence. Ronald broke it.

"Anyway, I wish it would end. I hate this sort of thing, and I'd give a good deal to know what it really was that started it."

"Ask them," Janet suggested, her eyes on the loosening edge of her shoe-sole.

"I did."

"What did they say?"

"Nothing. It was Rob, and he just laughed and said, 'Speaking of rats, I believe I left my book upstairs.'"

Janet pondered.

"What in the world did he mean?" she said at last, unable to read any sinister statement into the words.

"You 'll have to ask him. Then he picked up his stick and himself, and went off and left me sitting there."

In spite of herself, Janet's sigh of relief was audible. Then, as Ronald arose and began looking about for his hat, she asked abruptly, —

"When have you heard from Sidney?"

"Tuesday. Why?"

"Nothing." Janet rose in her turn, for it was obvious that the discussion must end. "I only wish she were here to bully her compatriots into behaving themselves."

Nevertheless, as she mounted the stairs to her own room, Janet Leslie was uncomfortably conscious that it was someone besides the Argyles who needed to be bullied into good behaviour. Blame lay on both sides; to one side alone be-

longed the honour, or the dishonour, of being the first cause of blame, and Janet, in her saner moments, admitted to herself that she was it. Worst of all, up to the present hour, she had supposed that everybody in the house was aware of her position, and half of her defiant disregard of consequences had had its source in that belief. Now that, for no cause whatsoever, she had assumed this attitude of brazen indifference, she found it hard to see how she could return to the paths of meekness, and yet sacrifice no whit of her dignity. Some day, she would talk it over with Ronald, perhaps confess the truth, perhaps even ask his advice, although she knew in advance what form that advice would take. As for Rob — She shrugged her thin little shoulders. His opinions did not count. He was an American and rude withal, critical and rude. She would be glad when the time came for his return to New York.

Descending the stairs, a half-hour later, Janet met Rob at the top of the lower flight. She stepped back to allow him to pass, moved less by consideration for his lameness than by a sudden memory of the old-time superstition that it is ill luck to pass on the stairs. For the moment, as he saw her standing there, Rob forgot the feud and hailed her jovially, for the intoxication of the

wintry air and of the moonlight was upon him, and other and indoor things seemed of small account. All that glorious, clean, clear afternoon, he had been sleighing with Day, out past Sainte Foy church to Cap Rouge and home by the Sillery Road. In the still, cold air, the snow had squeaked beneath the horses' hoofs, the bells had rung out crisply, and the dropping sun had cast long bluish shadows across the glistening fields. Then the sun had fallen through the yellow west, and the golden afterglow had risen up to meet the licking tongues of the aurora, until both afterglow and aurora had lost their lustre before the dazzling circle of the winter moon. The driver's calls to his horses sounded out as sharply as ever; but, on the seat behind him, the talk had fallen into silence while, as though to take the place of words, one fur-clad shoulder had nestled against the other. And Rob, in the growing darkness, had smiled to himself, as he had recalled the dainty remoteness, only a year before, of that same little gray fur coat.

Just outside the toll-gate, the horses broke their trot and fell to plodding soberly along. An instant later, however, they shied violently. From out the darkening landscape, a vision had sprung up from beneath their very feet, a vision whose stiff black hat was bound to his head with a

knotted handkerchief, and who pried himself to his feet by means of a snowshoe in each mittened hand.

"Oh, it 's you again," the vision said, in level, unaccented voice. "I thought it was you, you know."

Day omitted conventional greeting. Not all the repetition in the world could accustom her to Sir George's trick of springing up upon the scene like a roving British Jack-in-the-box.

"Where did you come from?" she asked abruptly.

"Here. I was resting a bit, you know. I 've learned to do as you said."

"What was that?" Day demanded, wholly at a loss to remember the especial nugget of wisdom to which Sir George was obviously referring.

"To sit on my shoes," he made reply. "If I lay one across the other, they don't leak so very much and it 's far more comfortable than sitting on the snow."

"But what do you sit down for at all?" Day persisted.

In the pale yellow moonlight, Sir George bent upon her a glance of rebuke for her limited understanding.

"Because I get so very tired," he made answer then.

From an ominous trembling of the gray-furred shoulder beside him, Rob judged that Day was likely to be speechless, judged, too, that it would be well for him to come to her relief.

"Good evening, Sir George," he said.

"Oh, good evening!" Sir George sought for his glass, but missed it by reason of the size of the thumb of his mitten. Without the glass, he peered up uncertainly at the face above him. "I 'm afraid I have n't — "

"Oh, yes, you have. I 'm Rob Argyle."

"Oh! The fellow in the sleeping car?"

"Yes."

"The lame one?"

"The very same."

"Good evening. I say, how 's your leg?"

"Cold as blazes," Rob made cheery answer. "How are yours?"

"Mine? Oh, but mine are n't lame, you know," Sir George explained dubiously.

"Not yet. They will be, though."

Sir George cast an anxious glance down at the members under discussion.

"What makes you think they will?"

"Because it 's not good for them to go snow-shoeing all over the Cove Fields, and then sit down in the snow to rest."

Sir George looked up at the occupants of the

sleigh, his lower jaw dangling loosely in the sling of the kerchief.

"Perhaps it is n't," he gave assent. "But it 's so tiresome, this snowshoeing, that a fellow has to rest up a bit now and then."

Day once more plunged into the conversation.

"What makes you do it, if you find it so tiresome?" she asked.

"Because it 's the thing to do here, you know. When I go home, they 'll all ask me if I went snowshoeing in Quebec, just as they 'll ask me if I saw Wall Street, when I was in New York, or if I ate cheese in Neufchâtel," Sir George explained. Then he started suddenly, his languid attention evidently impaled upon the point of a new idea. "I say, you know," he queried; "how does it happen that you two chaps are together?"

This time, Day stared at him in unmixed astonishment. Could it be that Sir George Porteous was losing that minus quantity, his wits?

"Why should n't we be together?" she demanded, so shortly that Sir George Porteous dodged at the question as at a physical blow.

"No reason," he reassured her; "no reason at all. It 's all right, you know. I only thought it a bit strange, when you 're the only two friends I have in the city, that you should happen to be friends of each other, too."

Day hunted for her handkerchief. Rob's own voice was so unsteady as to drive him to seek the briefest possible words.

"Very strange, inasmuch as this is my sister."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Sir George turned to Day.

"And he is your brother?"

"Yes."

For the space of a moment, Sir George pondered. Then, —

"How rummy!" he observed, with thoughtful satisfaction.

It ended with their bringing Sir George home to the Château. Wedged bodkinwise between them and supported by a snowshoe in either mittened hand, Sir George came riding in the Grande Allée. For the most part, he communed with himself. Once, however, he broke the silence and gave tongue to the stars.

"It 's quite my own idea," he assured an imaginary audience. "A fellow's hat comes off in the drifts, and it 's no end of a fuss to get down and pick it up. Once it 's tied on, you see, there 's no more trouble."

And so it was that, intoxicated with ozone and cold and suppressed hilarity, Rob Argyle, coming up the stairs, was in a frame of mind to forget his

feuds and all similar concerns and share his overflowing jollity with whomsoever he might meet. And, as it chanced, he met Janet just at the head of the stairs.

"Hullo, Janet!" he called jovially. "How goes it?"

"Very well, thank you."

The echo of his own voice dulled his ears to the icy chill of Janet's reply. From below, through the open door of his mother's room, he could hear, by occasional words and many giggles, that Day was giving her mother a full account of their recent meeting. It was for him to pour the same tale into the ears of Janet.

"You 've missed it, Janet. You ought to have been with us," he continued, with a bland disregard of the fact that, uninvited, Janet would scarcely have been likely to have made a part of their expedition. "We 've been interviewing the freak of the ages, and you 'd better believe he was amusing."

"Who was he?" Janet asked sedately, as Rob halted before her with the obvious intention of carrying the tale of his adventures into its last chapter.

"One of your crazy Britishers. We found him sitting on his snowshoes, out by the Cove Fields, and we have just deposited him at his own door."

"Where was that?" Janet still held her voice level, although, looking up at Rob, it took all her resolution not to meet his mood half way. Rob's face, alert and alight, was most friendly and winning just then, his yellow hair lay crisply about his forehead, his blue eyes were eager and alive with fun, while his fur-lined coat, reaching to his heels, added inches to his height and manliness to his whole figure. As he stood there, cap in hand, smiling at her with the gay friendliness she had supposed forever dead, Janet could feel the whole gentler, better side of her nature struggling to rush out and greet his own. It would be so good to be back again on the old, familiar, jovial terms. Not even to Ronald had she been willing to confess how much she had missed Rob out of her life. And now here he was, forgetting the past, and ready — She drew herself up sharply. That was just the trouble. He was forgetting the past, probably because it was a matter of no importance to him. Very likely he had not minded it in the least that they had quarrelled; very likely it never had occurred to him to notice how systematically she had held herself aloof from his society. That was all she had counted to him, something to play with when Day was busy, something to be thrown aside and forgotten when Day was at hand

and at leisure. And, in the meantime, she had been wasting long hours of worry over a situation which, in so far as Rob's minding it was concerned, was wholly imaginary. Her bad temper, like most other sins, had reacted on herself and made only herself uncomfortable. And, as Janet's mind went leaping along from point to point, she was conscious of a furious regret for the tear-soaked handkerchief which she had just now rolled into a tight little ball and thrown into her top bureau drawer. She raised her head defiantly; but she turned her back to the light.

"Where was that?" Rob was echoing. "The Château, of course; that seems to be the freak-shop for the entire province. This fellow is the gem of the whole show, though. He was in the sleeper, the day I came up. Since then, I 've seen him, three or four times. He has a trick of appearing at odd hours, like the Fool in Shakespeare's plays, only Shakespeare never made one half so fooly."

"How interesting!" Janet's tone was modelled on that of certain of her mother's callers. It was remote and elderly and wholly indulgent to the vivacious viewpoint of her companion.

"You bet he is! Last time, we found him just as a couple of nuns were shooing him out from the Hôtel Dieu cloisters. To-day, togged out in

scarlet mitties and a bandage over his hat to hold it on, he was doing a trick on snowshoes. At least, he is never trite. He does all the regulation things; but he manages to add a fresh, artistic touch to the way he goes about them. Some day or other, I expect to find him sliding down the face of Cape Diamond, to see if it hurt Montgomery when he fell. What have you been doing, all afternoon?" Rob wound up cheerily.

"Sewing."

Rob shrugged his shoulders.

"Not out, this jolly afternoon?"

Janet's lips shut for a moment.

"I had nothing to take me out," she replied then.

"Why did n't you come along with us? There would have been plenty of room. You 're so little, we could stick you in anywhere," Rob said benevolently.

The matter-of-course assurance of his tone nettled Janet.

"As a general thing, I don't invite myself," she answered, with an ominous dignity.

Rob laughed, as he mounted the last step of the stairs and turned towards his own door.

"I suspect that 's one on me, Janet," he remarked, with easy good-humour. "Well, never mind. Next time, just remind me, and I 'll invite you."

Janet started to speak. Then, as she heard Day's step in the hall below, she turned around just in time to catch the merry, mischievous gesture of warning and of feigned terror which Day was sending up to her brother in the hall above. For an instant, Janet flushed hotly. She was sure that Day had been there long, listening and keeping up a commentary of derisive gesticulation which, no doubt, had gone far to account for Rob's hilarity. Rob had called the stranger a crazy Britisher. Doubtless, he had been used to call her another and, when her back was turned, to make merry over her with Day. She stiffened with the thought, unjust, unmerited though it was. Then she cast one scornful glance down at Day, one glance of half-veiled antagonism up at Rob.

"Thank you," she said curtly. "I only accept invitations from my friends."

Then she turned away, and, mounting the stairs to her own room, she opened her top bureau drawer and sought for her handkerchief.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE house was silent and dark, that night, when Ronald Leslie came up the steps. The click of his latchkey, however, was answered by the softer click of an electric button, and by the creak of an upstairs door.

"Ronald!" Janet called softly, from over the banisters.

"You up?"

Janet's arm, plunging about in search of the second sleeve of her dressing-gown, cast strange shadows on the wall.

"I heard you come, and I got up. I want to hear about it."

"To-night?" Even his whispered question had a laugh lurking in it.

"Now. I 'm not sleepy, truthfully. Come up and tell me," she begged. And Ronald, shaking himself free of his coat, mounted the stairs.

He found a tight little bundle of blue blanket and blue dressing-gown huddled in a corner of the couch, and the sole arm-chair the room afforded, drawn forward and evidently awaiting him.

"Bad child! You 'll catch a cold," he admonished her, as, with one strong hand, he dragged the coverings from the bed and heaped them about her. "You ought to be asleep."

A shapeless lump of bedclothes pointed vaguely in the direction of the clock.

"It 's early yet, and I want to hear about it. Sit down and tell me. Something funny has happened; I know it from the look in your eyes."

Ronald laughed, as he settled himself in the arm-chair. His laugh increased, until his broad shoulders shook.

"Somebody happened, Janet," he corrected her.

"Who?"

"Sir George Porteous."

"Who 's he?"

"An embodied joke." Ronald felt about in his pockets, produced a card, and tossed the card across to Janet. "This was it," he added then. "He 's out from London, says he has been here since October; but, if he has, I don't see how I can have missed him. He 's not the sort to pass in a crowd."

"Why not?" Janet asked again, and again Ronald laughed.

"Because he is so funny, funny. He seems a good little chap, well-bred and good-natured; but

I never saw any human being with so little sense, nor so little idea how to show off what sense he has."

"Where did he come from?" Janet demanded a bit impatiently, for it seemed to her that Ronald held a monopoly of the joke.

"London."

"Yes, you said so. But at your dinner?"

"The chief asked him. It seems, he brought a letter to the chief, and there was some talk of his coming into the office for the winter. I fancy the talk will go up in smoke, though, for Sir George Porteous was never constructed for office life. He asked me if I did n't find it very tiresome, sitting on a stool, all day; and, after he had digested my answer, he followed it up with a question as to whether a fellow might n't bring his own footrest, the stools were so beastly high."

"Ronald!" Janet protested.

"For a fact, Janet. I 'm not making up a word. You see, I had him to talk to. The chief told me about him, as soon as I went in, told me he was a stranger here and asked me to look out for him. He may have thought the other fellows were more likely to chaff him. Sir George was late coming; we were half through dinner, when he came sauntering in with some wild excuse about having sat too long in the snow

and being so stiff that it took him a good while to dress."

"Ronald!" Janet protested again.

And again Ronald replied concisely, —

"Fact."

"What is he like?"

"The sort of thing that drifts out here, now and then, to keep us content with being colonials."

"Then he 's not of our sort?" Janet queried.

"Thank the Immortals, no!" Ronald said fervently. Then he relented. "And yet, after all, Janet, I rather liked the fellow. He is funny, the funniest thing that ever talked; but now and then he had an idea, and the idea was generally good. The only trouble was that they came so rarely that they took me by surprise, and I answered at random and threw him off the track. He 's easily thrown off the track, too," Ronald added reminiscently.

"What does he look like?" Janet demanded. "Maybe I have seen him somewhere."

Ronald searched his mind for words.

"I 'm no good at description, Janet," he said then. "He is little and dark, with lanky dark hair that dangles all over his forehead, and a lean little lower jaw that dangles all over his collar. It has dangled there till it has worn a pair of deep, deep wrinkles in his cheeks. He has a

monocle, and he carries his mouth ajar, and, when he wants to be extra impressive, he gesticulates with his forefinger."

Janet sat up alertly.

"And sticks his nose in the air, and turns his head back and forth without moving his eyes, and looks as if he did n't know enough to stop a street-car ? " she asked.

"The very same."

She sank back again among her blankets.

"Hh! I know him," she asserted.

"Know him ? "

"Yes. I 've seen him on the terrace."

"Ever heard him talk ? " Ronald queried.

"No."

"Then you 've lost a treat. His first words to me were astounding. The chief introduced us, and he put up his glass and looked at me, up and up and up and up, for he 's a little fellow. Then he dropped his glass and said, 'Oh, how do you do ? Do you happen to have a safety pin anywhere about you ? ' "

Janet subsided among her blankets.

"To pin on his bib ? " she giggled.

"Nobody knows. Latourc sat on the other side, and he choked until he had to leave the table. Under the circumstances, I did n't feel like asking too many questions," Ronald con-

fessed. "Do you know, Janet, it was a funny thing; but I kept thinking, all the time I was talking to him, how Day would have taken him in. I was out on the Cove Fields with her, one afternoon, and another fellow of about the same sort came along and spoke to us. He was n't nearly so funny; but I thought Day would die of him." As he spoke, Ronald started to rise.

Janet had sobered at his words. All at once, there had come back to her the memory of her real reason for summoning Ronald to her room. The talk, drifting into other channels, had made her forget her resolution. Now she gripped it sturdily.

"Don't go yet, Ronald. You are n't sleepy, I know."

Something in her tone caught his attention, always vigilant where Janet was concerned.

"What is it, dear? Is something wrong?" he asked instantly.

"Yes. No. Not now. But are you too tired to stay and talk it over?"

For his answer, Ronald seated himself and waited, waited long and patiently for, now that her chance was come, Janet seemed loath to speak.

"Do you remember the day of the storm, Ronald?" she blurted out at length.

"Now that her chance was come, Janet seemed loath to speak." *Page* 200.

"The day things happened?"

She nodded. Under her muffling blankets, he could see her hands working uneasily. The pause lengthened once more.

"Did you ever know what started all the fuss?" she blurted out again.

"No."

"Well, I did."

"You?"

"Yes, I." She reiterated her statement, with a sudden wave of the satisfaction girls sometimes take in heaping blame upon their own heads. "It was all my fault; at least, not all, but mostly. Anyway, I started it."

"But, Janet, how?"

Her reply came crisply.

"Fighting Day. Then fighting Rob."

"Rob?" Ronald looked up from the carpet. "I did n't suppose anybody ever fought with him."

"You 've fought him, your own self, ever since that night," Janet retorted sharply, for she was quick to feel the disappointment which sounded underneath Ronald's surprise. "Besides, you said, yourself, that you had a fuss with him, that very night."

Ronald's face grew scarlet.

"So I did, Janet. I was wild about you, and off my nerve."

"So was I off my nerve, I suppose," she responded. "Let 's not get mad at each other, Ronald." She laughed a little nervously. "That would be the last straw."

But his answering smile was free from all trace of anger.

"I 'm not cross, Janet. I 'm only trying to think it out. What started you and Day off ? "

Janet hesitated. Then she resolved to make a clean breast of the matter.

"I was cross, that morning. I got up, cross. My hair would n't do. It tangled and threw the comb, and that broke. Then I tore the placket of my skirt, not straight, but all off cornerwise. Then I came down to breakfast, and found Marie had burned the porridge till it tasted like a salt-hay bonfire. By the time breakfast was over, I did n't care what happened, so, when Day began to criticize the Quebec shops, I turned around and told her just what I thought of her." Janet had straightened up, blankets and all, in the fervour of her tale. Now she sank back again, with a nervous little giggle. "And I did n't think nice things at all," she added.

Ronald's eyes were once more on the carpet. He spoke without lifting them, —

"I 'm sorry."

Janet coloured. Then, —

"So was I, the minute I had done it," she said. "And, the worst of it was, the more sorry I felt, the more I longed to go at her again. It has been so, ever since. I 've been sorry and ashamed; but she has been so fluffy and superior about it all that I have been tempted, a dozen times over, to start fresh and do it all over again. It seemed a shame to be so sorry about something that had n't taken any more effect."

A little pause followed her last words. Suddenly she broke it by asking,—

"Do you think I 'm very horrid, Ronald?"

He roused himself at the question.

"No, dear; not horrid. I 'm only sorry and a good deal surprised."

Her colour came again, while she looked at him through her long lashes.

"You did n't think I had it in me, Ronald?" she inquired.

"No, Janet. I did n't."

"Well, I have," she said, with sudden spirit. "What 's more, I suspect most girls have, if the truth were known. It 's there, all the time; it is only a question whether something comes up to set us off. Some of us take more setting than others; some of us go farther than others, when we 're set. But I don't believe there 's a girl living, a real, live, healthy girl, that has n't a

streak of gunpowder in her, somewhere or other. If there is, then I don't want to meet her."

"Nor I," Ronald assented unexpectedly. "Neither do I want to meet a girl who leaves her gunpowder lying around loose. If a spark drops on it, she is as likely to blow up her best friend as her worst enemy. It 's as uncomfortable for one as for the other; but it generally makes some difference afterwards to the girl herself." He spoke with the quiet dignity which he assumed at times, a dignity which never failed to make Janet think back to their father, now sleeping under the Mount Hermon trees. Then he held out his arms. "Come over here, Janet," he said.

And Janet came. Great girl that she was, blankets and all she curled herself up on Ronald's knee and nestled to the circling grasp of his strong arms.

"Is n't it all horrid?" she said brokenly at length.

And Ronald answered gravely,—

"Yes, dear, it is. Still, I 'm glad you 've told me."

"I should have told you before, only I supposed you all knew it."

"But how could we know?"

Janet lifted her head from his shoulder, with a touch of her former spirit.

"I should think you had time enough to talk it over and get all the facts, while I was freezing in the coalhole," she responded.

"But who was there to tell them?"

"Day."

"You 're not quite fair to Day, Janet. You never were."

"What 's the use, when she 's so more than fair to herself?" Janet protested mutinously. "It never seems to occur to Day Argyle that she is n't just right, never. Perhaps she is all right. She may be, for all I know. Still, I do wish she would show occasional misgivings on the subject. I 'd like to see her, just once, all mussed up and crying her eyes out."

Prudently Ronald changed the subject. He felt that Janet was sounding feminine depths which he could never hope to fathom. Rather than flounder about too aimlessly, he dived in another direction.

"But you said you fought with Rob, too," he suggested.

Janet sat up straight.

"So I did. It was afterwards, and it almost killed me," she confessed. "I did n't care about Day so much; but it has worried me into mental cramps, this fuss with Rob. I was all to blame, and he is such a dear. I can see him now, poor

old boy, stooping down to get his stick and then getting up and looking at me, as if he thought I had gone crazy. Perhaps I had." Again Janet's laugh threatened to become hysterical.

With rare patience, Ronald waited until she was quiet once more. Then he said gently,—

"Tell me all about it, Janet; that is, if you don't mind."

"But I don't mind, Ronald. It 's what I stayed awake for. It 's worse than ever, to-night, and I 've just got to tell somebody or die," Janet burst out, in a sudden access of woe.

"What is wrong, to-night?"

"Everything," Janet wailed comprehensively. "It was my fault again, though, if that is any comfort to you. You had gone, and I was just going downstairs, when I met Rob coming up. All at once, he was just like his dear old jolly self, and talked away just as he used to do. I was stiff and poky and horrid, for I was surprised and did n't know what to make of it; but he did n't take any notice and went on talking, till I almost forgot we had been keeping still. And then, all at once, I heard a little noise, and there was Day, snipping up her nose at me and making fun of me behind my back, and I just snapped out something and marched up here to my room, and I have n't been down since."

"But, Janet — "

"Don't let 's argue," she said impatiently. "What 's the use? I know just how bad I was; I 've bitten off my own nose to spite my face. If Day had only kept herself out of it, Rob and I would have been good friends, within ten minutes. I felt it coming; and then, all at once, she spoiled it all."

"But she did n't spoil your friendship, in the first place," Ronald suggested.

"Yes, she did, too. She stirred me up and made me cross," Janet insisted, quite oblivious of the fact that, a quarter of an hour earlier, she had assigned another cause for her bad temper.

"And so you took it out on Rob?"

"Don't laugh, Ronald," she begged him. "Truly it is n't funny. You would n't think so, if you 'd seen Rob's face. He was all white, white, and his eyes grew big, and his lips twitched. I think he was afraid of what I 'd do next. You see, I went to the library and found him there, all sole alone, and I went over and sat down beside him to talk. He looked as lonesome as I felt. And then, all of a sudden, he began teasing me. I hate being teased; I 'm not used to it, and, that day, I did n't like it a bit. I was all edgewise, and I — I rather think I hoped he 'd cuddle me, instead. But he did n't; he teased. Then I lost

my temper, and said things I did n't mean, and then, while he was getting on his feet, I ran away and left him."

Ronald's arm tightened suddenly.

"And that was how you came in the vault?" he inquired, for, up to now, Janet had maintained a sturdy reticence in regard to the motive which had led to her explorations.

"I did n't mind that," she said shortly. "It was a fair punishment. I knew it was going to be a fearful storm; I knew that very likely the cars would stop running. Instead of sticking to Rob and seeing that he came home safely, I ran away from him and left him to get on alone as best he could."

"And the vault?" Ronald questioned again.

Janet's colour rose in her cheeks.

"That was part of it. He came to the door and called after me down the stairs. I was n't going to let him catch me then; I was too angry. I expected he would come downstairs after me, and I was bound I 'd not be seen, so I dodged inside the nearest door."

"And?" Ronald asked.

"And the door had a spring lock," Janet answered conclusively. Then she added, "And, when I did get home, there was Rob put to bed for four mortal days, and his mother half-insane

with fear he had done himself a harm he 'd never get over. I used to lie awake, nights, and imagine him bedridden and it all my fault, and think how pale and thin and sad he probably was. And then, when he did come downstairs, there he was, jolly and big and handsome as ever, and not limping one bit more than he always had done. But do you wonder I hated myself and the Argyles and everybody else? Everything had gone wrong, and I did n't care for anybody, and I was to blame for it all, and the worst of it all was that — none of — you — took — the trouble — to ask — me — what the trouble — really was." And Janet, her head on Ronald's broad shoulder, fell to sobbing in good earnest.

It was growing late, before Ronald felt the last long sob go shivering through her thin, lithe little body. Then, and not till then, he said gently, —

"I 'm sorry, Janet. It has been very messy. Still, it is done, and all we can do now is to go to work to undo it."

"We?" she queried incredulously.

"Yes, dear."

"But I began it."

"And I helped to keep it up," he reminded her.

Janet gave a sudden, vengeful sniff.

"But we were n't the only ones to blame."

"We were the first," he reminded her again.

"I suppose. But what are you going to do about it, Ronald?"

"Make friends."

"How?"

"Whatever way shows itself first."

She compressed her lips doubtfully.

"Apologize?" she questioned.

"Certainly."

"But, Ronald, I won't! At least, not now."

"Why not?"

"Because I 'd rather get friends first, and apologize afterwards," she protested.

"When a cart gets to dragging the horse, it generally runs down hill and ends in the gutter," he suggested.

"Don't!" she said rebelliously. "You sound like a moral, an Æsop moral, and I can do my own moralizing. I know I ought to apologize; I 've known it from the start, and the knowing it has helped to make me cranky. However, the long and the short of it is, I don't want to."

"Why not?" he questioned.

She slid down from his knee and stood facing him, a shapeless cocoon of blankets topped with a face which, just then, seemed to be all eyes.

"Because," she answered; "one feels such a fool, while the apology is being accepted and

the fatted calf is being butchered. Wait till I go out to Cap Rouge, some day in the holidays, and I 'll telephone in my apology from there."

"But next week is Christmas," he reminded her.

"What if it is ? "

"And one can't fight on Christmas."

"One can let each other alone, then," she retorted. "We are n't going to hang up our stockings together."

Ronald smiled, as he rose to his feet.

"No," he assented. "Still, one hates to talk about Peace on Earth, when there 's such a jolly row going on in the house. If I were you, Janet — "

"You are n't," she said. "But what about it ? "

"If I were you, I rather think I 'd apologize before then."

She stood, for a moment, her eyes on the floor, while she pondered the matter. Then she lifted her eyes and smiled, with somewhat of her old merriment.

"If I were you, brother, I should, and munch my humble pie for Christmas dinner. Being myself, I rather think I 'll hold my peace and let the storm blow over as best it can. Rob is going away, the twenty-seventh. By the time he gets back, you and Day will have made it up, and

taken me into grace once more. After that, things will go swimmingly. I 'm sorry, and ashamed, and all the rest. Still, I do think, all things considered, that those two Argyles have been rather more superior and forgiving than the case warrants." She laughed, and her laugh was not wholly mirthful. Then, all of a sudden, her face gentled, as she looked up at her tall brother. "Ronald, you are a darling," she said impetuously. "I 'm glad I 've talked it out with you. Some day, I may even get to a state of sanctity where I am willing to take your advice. Anyway, I know you are in the right of it, and I 'm glad I 've got you to give me a lecture now and then. Now go to bed, you poor dear thing, or you 'll be dead in the morning." And she stretched up her face for a good-night kiss.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DAY crossed three items off her list. Then she bit the end of her pencil and shook her head. Rob, leaning back in a nest of furs, eyed her askance.

"What now?" he queried.

"Nothing; only we don't seem to be getting on at all, and we must be home by lunch-time."

"Why?" Rob asked, with suave unconcern.

"Because we both were so late at breakfast that, if we do it again at lunch, Mrs. Leslie will make a fuss."

"Then I 'll let loose the dogs of war, and we 'll have sassaquaw," Rob reassured her. "Look here, Day, this is the windiest corner in town, and I 'm freezing. Can't you chew your pencil just as well, if our Jehu drives ahead?"

"Punch him with your stick and set him going; I 'm having too much on my mind to talk French," Day responded, heedless of the chance to air the results of certain morning lessons. "By the way, what is *sassaquaw?*"

"It means no end of a row. I got it out of a book," Rob replied, as he scientifically prodded their carter in the ribs. "The word stuck in my mind; it seemed such a satisfactory summing up of the whole Leslie-Argyle situation. Did you hear Janet turn and rend me, last night?"

"I 'm neither deaf nor blind," Day retorted. "That is why I don't want to be late to lunch, after we both missed breakfast. It would look as if we were afraid and were keeping out of their way."

"So I am," Rob answered composedly.

Day lifted her head from her list.

"I ain't," she responded, with a fervour which the more decorous form of the verb would have been powerless to give.

Rob laughed. Then he squinted down over her shoulder.

"How are we getting on, anyway?" he asked.

Day's answer held an accent of despair.

"We are n't. Rob, I love Christmas, when it comes; but the week before it is awful. What are we going to give mother?"

"Give her the mink head opera bag, and call it Moses."

Day wrinkled her brows.

"But she has n't a particle of mink to her name," she objected.

"No matter. Time she had. What is mink, anyhow?"

"Like the lining of your coat. Mother wears seal. Don't you know the difference?"

"No. They both are skin and thatched with brown hair. Well, if you don't want that, what about the little maple leaf with the garnets?"

Day's nose went upward.

"Tourist-y," she said succinctly.

"Maybe. Still, it 's pretty, and it 's her birthstone, too. Why don't we get her some sort of leather thing?"

"But we 've bought the dressing-case for father."

"What of it?"

"We don't want to look as if we took advantage of wholesale rates," Day suggested. Then she glanced up. "Rob, where is this man taking us?"

"'F I know. I communicated to his ribs an impression that he was to go ahead, and he appears to be going. If he keeps on, I imagine he 'll land in Beauport. Shall I stop him?"

"No. Turn him around and head him back into Buade Street. Mother loves furs, and we 'd best get something for her there. I don't know but," Day gave an anxious sigh; "but the bag will be the best thing. Then, if she does n't like it, she can give it to me."

Rob joggled her sociably with his elbow.

"Well, I like that! Where do I come in?" he protested.

"Boys don't carry bags. What would you do with it?"

"Carry it to church, with a span clean handkerchief in it, and my offertory penny. Have you bought my present yet, Day?"

"Ages ago. Did you get mine?"

"How do you know you'll get any?" Then his voice lost its merriment. "I say, Day, what about Janet and Ronald?"

"Why, nothing," Day responded blankly.

"But it seems rather beastly to be in the house with them, and not give them anything."

"In the South African war, the Boers scalped their enemies on Christmas Eve," she reminded him.

"I'm no bore. Neither do I care to offer my scalp to Ronald," he retorted.

"Ronald is n't a bore."

"He bores me."

Day's eyes belied the gravity of her voice, as she gave rebuke, —

"Rob, I believe you are jealous of Ronald."

He laughed.

"I don't appear to have much cause."

"No; but you don't want us to make up, for

fear he 'll get in your way," she persisted merrily.

To her surprise, she felt Rob's shoulder come close against her own, as he answered with sudden soberness, —

"That 's where you 're right, little sister. I 'd hate it like fury to come back from New York and find myself sidetracked once more."

"Once more?" she echoed. "Were you ever?"

He hesitated. Then, —

"Yes, I was," he said; "when I first came."

As a rule, Day hated demonstrations. Now, under the robe, her hand sought Rob's fingers.

"You never will be again," she said. And Rob believed her, believed her more, when she added, "Oh, Rob, I wish you did n't have to go!"

"Only for two weeks," he reminded her.

"But so much can happen in two weeks. Besides, he may keep you longer."

"I don't see why he should."

"Nor I. And yet, I get uneasy whenever I think about it. I never felt that way before." She faced him abruptly, and sat looking steadily into his blue eyes. "Rob, you think you have been gaining?" she asked him.

"Sure."

"And that your falls and things have n't done you any real harm?"

"Not a bit."

"And you 'll be all right in time?"

"Sure."

She sank back in her seat, as if reassured.

"Yes," she said a little wearily; "but the time is so long."

Rob reached around behind her and pulled the robe into place. For some reason best known to himself, he neglected to withdraw his arm.

"You hate it, too?" he queried.

She nodded vehemently.

"Yes; and, the funny thing is, I hate it for myself even more than I do for you. There are so many things I want to do together, and we can't; and, every now and then, I get to thinking what a chance it is, our being together, this winter, with nothing to do but know each other. We could do so many things, if you only could."

Rob needed no interpreter to show him the meaning of the final phrase, nor yet of the unwonted vibrant note in Day's young voice. He drew the robe a little closer and held it there firmly, while he sat silent for a moment, with his blue eyes fixed upon the horizontal wrinkles of coonskin that barred their driver's back.

"Never mind, Day," he said then. "If I could have done all the things, I 'd have been in Exeter now, not here. Perhaps, all things considered,

it is just as well as it is. Only be sure you miss me, while I 'm gone."

She snuggled back against his arm.

"Miss you, Rob! And you really have to go, next week?"

"The twenty-seventh. I 'll be back by the middle of the month, by the latest; and, mind you, Day, you 're to come over to meet me at Levis. No shutting yourself up to peek down at me, this time, when I come in the house!"

They both laughed, as at some far-off memory. Then Day asked, —

"And bring Ronald with me?"

"If you do, I 'll chuck him off the ferry. It 's you I want, Day, not your henchman."

"He may not be henching, even by that time," Day answered gayly. "But, Rob, all this is idyllic, and you know I think you are the dearest thing that ever breathed; but here is Buade Street, and we must focus our mind on the question of mother and all that trail of Ross cousins."

Rob glanced up at the clock on the City Hall; then he caressed himself with his unoccupied hand.

"I 'd rather focus my stomach on some dinner, Day," he objected. "It is half past one by the meetin' house clock, and affection is more enjoyable than it is filling. Get the bag for mother,

and, if it has to match, order a seal tail hung on each corner. Then get a bunch of assorted hatpins for the Ross tribe, and come along home to lunch. I 'll give you ten minutes to shop. Out you go, ma'am, and be quick!" And Rob flapped open the robe and curled up his legs to let her pass him.

"Oh, how do you do? I was hoping I 'd see you about, somewhere."

Day sat down again and drew the robe across her knees. Miss a chance to converse with Sir George Porteous she would not.

"How do you do?" she answered blithely. "Is n't it cold?"

"Beastly. It makes a fellow feel quite uncomfortable. How is your brother's leg?" Sir George queried, without the slightest apparent consciousness that Rob was present to speak for himself.

"Better, I hope. You are not used up by your yesterday's trip?"

"Used up?"

"Yes. Tired. Worn out," Day explained laboriously. "We say *used up*, sometimes."

"Oh, I see. It 's an Americanism. I hoped I 'd hear some. How interesting!" Sir George's level voice, however, gave no evidence that the interest was overmastering his nerves. "I was looking for you," he added.

"Here?"

"Oh, no. Anywhere. I've just been down to the florist shop, not the first florist shop, but the second one, where the pretty girl is. I thought I might meet you on the way. I do seem to meet you, you know, almost everywhere I stop. If you are n't there, when I come, you get there just as I am leaving. But I wanted to see you, to-day."

"Behold us!" Rob folded his arms and smirked down at Sir George who gazed back at him in manifest bewilderment.

"Yes, that is what I was saying. I told you, just at first, that I was glad to see you."

"I beg your pardon," Rob interposed. "You told us 'how do you do.'"

Again Sir George studied the face before him. Then he gave up the riddle and turned to Day.

"It will be Christmas, next week," he observed. Then he paused to see how she took the information.

She took it calmly.

"Yes. We were doing our Christmas shopping, this morning."

"And are beastly late about getting home to lunch," Rob added suggestively.

"So am I. I really am quite hungry." Then he turned back to Day. "I thought I would give a dinner," he announced.

Day hesitated, slightly at a loss as to what answer she was expected to make.

"A Christmas dinner?" she said guardedly.

"Yes. I like to notice the day. It seems too bad to let it pass without paying any attention to it." Sir George spoke as if the great World Holiday were a species of puppy, trotting past him in the street. "Of course, when a fellow is away from home, he can't do much about it. Still, it's a day when one likes to give the children a good time, and all that."

Day fell in with his mood. She had never liked the man better than now, in his laboured effort to express his sympathy with the real spirit of the Christmas feast.

"Yes," she said cordially. "It is the children's day, and they always love it."

In his eagerness, Sir George clasped his fur-lined gloves upon the side of the sleigh.

"Yes, that is what I thought. I always like to make some little chap happy on Christmas," he assented. "That's why I am going to give a dinner."

"How lovely!" Day's mind, used to East Side missions, rushed up and down the city, hunting slums to garnish Sir George's festal board with shivering, starving humanity. "Where are you going to have your dinner?"

"At the hotel, the Château, you know."

Day's face expressed her surprise. She had fancied Sir George as lugging turkeys to the slums, not lugging the slums bodily into the candle-lighted, palm-decked, orchestra-accompanied glory of the Château dining-room.

"Will they be quite — quite — quite comfortable there?" she asked, in a vain endeavour to convey to Sir George a sense of the incongruity of his details, without seeming to dash cold water upon the heart and core of his plan.

"Oh, yes, I think so. There 's the lift," Sir George explained; "and it 's always very warm."

Day forced her laugh to express only a cheery sympathy.

"Whom are you going to ask?" she questioned.

Sir George's face beamed with a smile of perfect satisfaction.

"That 's just it," he observed. "I was looking for you to tell you now. I thought I would invite you and your brother."

For an instant, there was a silence. Then gently, very gently, Day spoke.

"I am sorry, Sir George, more sorry than I can tell you; but Christmas is our home day. We could n't leave our father and mother."

Sir George's face fell. Even in her mirth at

being classed as a little chap, Day pitied the sudden eclipse of his hopes.

"I am so sorry," she repeated.

Sir George's face brightened.

"You 'd really like to come?"

"Yes, if it were possible," Day said politely.

"Oh. Then make it the week after," he suggested, with more alertness than she had ever seen him show.

Smiling still, Day shook her head.

"Rob goes to New York, after Christmas. I could n't come without him."

Sir George's jaw was plainly sagging. It was obvious that his swift changes of plan were wearying him.

"When do you go?" he asked, turning to Rob.

"The twenty-seventh."

"Twenty-seventh. Twenty-fifth." Sir George appeared to be performing a sum in mental arithmetic. "Then make it the twenty-sixth."

Day hesitated. Before she could speak, Rob had cut in.

"All right, Sir George," he said jovially. "Thank you. You can count on us for the night after Christmas."

Sir George nodded in obvious self-approval.

"I 'm very glad," he said. "I made sure you would enjoy it. There 's another fellow I think I 'll ask, too."

"Another little chap?" Day queried, with an apparent innocence which wellnigh wrecked her brother's gravity.

"No; he 's older, quite a man. I only just met him, yesterday; but I fancy he 'd like to come. We 'll have some bonbons, you know, and a plum pudding, and make quite a thing of it. Good-by." And Sir George turned away and faced the chilly blast sweeping up from the river far below.

Rob watched him, as he rounded the corner by the post office and vanished out of sight. Then he turned to Day.

"Well, little chap," he said; "we 're in for it now. He 's a good little fellow, and I had n't the heart to disappoint him. We can only hope we don't choke to death at the table. Now do go in and bag the last of your shopping, for I can't live much longer on the anticipations of Sir George's Christmas feast."

Lunch was a thing of the past, when Rob and Day finally drove up to the Leslie door. Janet had betaken herself back to school long since, and Mrs. Argyle was invisible. Accordingly, Day found it unexpectedly easy to huddle her bundles in her arms and escape to her room, unobserved, before she joined Rob in the abandoned dining-room. Hungry and a little tired, they lingered long over their meal. When at

last they left the table and went in search of their mother, they found her in Rob's room, and Rob's half-packed suitcase lay on his bed.

"Moving?" he queried.

"Rob! How you startled me!"

"Sorry, dear. I thought you'd have heard me come stubbing in; but my fairy footfall must have been uncommonly light. What's the exodus?"

"We are going to Montreal for Christmas."

"The deuce we are!"

"Yes. Your father telegraphed, this morning. He thinks we'd enjoy the little change; and besides, it is better to let the Leslies have the day to themselves."

"Be thanked!" Rob observed piously. "Day and I were discussing the little item of Peace on Earth, just now, and we had come to the conclusion that, barring scalping knives, no Christmas presents were in order. I'm glad, though, we'll be out of the house."

"What shall I wear, mother?" Day demanded.

"Just like a girl!" Rob made swift comment. "I think I'd wear a hat and some boots. Mamma, what necktie shall I put on? Meantime, when do we go?"

"To-night. He has some plan for to-morrow. Then we shall be there Sunday and Monday and Christmas, and come back, Wednesday noon, in

time to pack you off to New York, the next day."

"In time for our dinner party," Rob corrected her. "We are asked out to dinner, the twenty-sixth."

"Where?"

"At the Château."

"By whom?" Mrs. Argyle looked a little uneasy.

"By Sir George Porteous."

"Who is he?"

"Day's Englishman."

"Day, dear?" Mrs. Argyle's two words included a round dozen of unspoken questions.

Rob made haste to reassure her.

"It 's all right, mother. I got acquainted with him, the day I came up, last October. Since then, he 's kept popping up at every turn. He 's the fellow we took home, last night. He 's a gentleman, really, a good fellow, only he has n't any especial brains. You need n't worry. I 'll look out for Day."

"But a stranger?" Mrs. Argyle demurred.

"That 's just the point. He is here alone, does n't know a soul but us and another little chap." Rob paused to giggle, before he went on, "He 's out here to see the world outside of London, and he has n't a particle of sense about getting at it, still less about getting acquainted.

He 's lonely, and it 's Christmas, and he wants to have a party. He asked us for Christmas night, on a general theory that children ought to have a Christmas party."

"Oh, he 's a child, then?"

But Rob shook his head.

"No one can tell. He looks like an Ancient of Days, and he has the pulpy gray matter of a six-months babe. At least, he is innocent, and won't be likely to harm us. Really, mother, if you 'd seen him, you would n't have had the heart to refuse. I 'll tell you about him, on the train. Now do relieve Day's anxiety on the subject of clothes, or she never will get packed in season to get off."

But Day had settled herself on the foot of the bed.

"Never mind the clothes," she said. "I want a light frock for dinners, and I know we 'll go to the theatre. Father always takes us. My packing will wait; but not Sir George Porteous. Rob, do show mother how he dangles his jaw when he talks."

However, Rob had scruples.

"Too late, Day. We 've agreed to eat his salt, and we can't hoot at him any longer. All in all," he shook his head again and thoughtfully; "I don't know but we 'd have made a better bar-

gain, if we had refused his dinner and kept him in stock as a means of dismissing the blues."

Nevertheless, in spite of Rob's scruples, Mrs. Argyle's face was red and teary, by the time she had heard all the details of the acquaintance of her children with Sir George Porteous. As she rose to resume her interrupted packing, she was ready to agree with Rob that such a host would not be noxious, albeit a stranger.

Ronald was late in coming up from the Saint Paul Street office, that night. It was later still when Janet came in, for she had telephoned to her mother that she had been asked to dine with a friend. They found the house in all the flurried stir of the Argyles' departure, and, in the midst of the flurry, there was no opportunity to speak of penitence, of Christmas peace, nor yet of the plans for Sir George Porteous's Christmas banquet.

And so, as it chanced, the holidays found the four young people still walking in their separate paths.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DOWN in his office in Saint Paul Street, the next afternoon, Ronald started at the speaking of his name, and turned around on his high stool.

"What 's the row?" he asked, for the face of his fellow clerk was red with suppressed merriment.

"A fellow to see you."

"Where?"

"Down in the shop. You 'll find him out among the stoves."

"You need n't be so hilarious about it," Ronald said indolently, as he slid off from his stool and shook himself into presentable condition. "Whoever the fellow is, he 's my joke, not yours." And, his rebuke offered, he went tramping down the staircase which led from the offices into the long suite of shops below.

In the extreme corner of the farthest one, he found Sir George Porteous. Sir George was immaculately groomed, and, thanks to a mild day, his buttonhole was appropriately garnished. Seated

on one of the low stoves, his hands lightly crossed upon his knee, he presented every appearance of having come to stay throughout the afternoon, if not to take up his permanent abode among the stoves around him. Ronald hailed him from the doorway.

"How do, Sir George! So you have decided to make us a visit."

Sir George looked up at him with a lack-lustre eye.

"Oh, no; I merely came to see you."

"That 's good! What if I show you about the place?"

Sir George hitched himself into a more permanent pose upon his cast-iron pedestal.

"I am quite comfortable, thank you. I came of an errand."

"To see the chief?" Ronald queried, for Sir George made no effort to impart to him the subject of any errand, and, quite naturally, he sought about in his mind to discover to whom else the errand would be directed.

"No; to see you," Sir George made tranquil reply. Then once more he fell silent.

Ronald waited, waited with one lobe of his brain trained upon the probable future actions of Sir George Porteous, the other upon certain letters which must be sent out by that evening's

mail. Mercifully, however, the mail did not close until half after eleven, so there was still time for the deliberate mental processes of Sir George Porteous. Ronald shifted his weight to the other foot; then he evened his weight and stood at attention.

"I am giving a dinner," Sir George announced at length.

Like Day Argyle, Ronald found himself at a loss as to how he was expected to meet the announcement.

"How interesting!" he observed dispassionately.

"Yes. I thought it would be interesting. It will be a Christmas dinner."

Ronald forced himself to smile cheerily.

"What a good idea!" he responded.

"Yes. It is so tiresome not to pay any attention to the day. This will not be on Christmas, exactly. It will be on the night after."

Ronald felt his stock of polite phrases running short.

"Oh," he assented courteously.

Sir George mistook his brevity for disapproval, not for paucity of ideas. He sought to justify himself.

"They could n't come on Christmas. They had to stop at home," he explained. "I am asking some children, you know."

"Then you do know people here in Quebec?"

"Only some children." Sir George spoke as if the weight of centuries rested upon his slim shoulders. "And that 's what I came down here for — really, it 's a beastly way — to ask you if you would come and dine, too."

Ronald looked slightly startled.

"Oh; but I 'm no good at amusing children, Sir George," he demurred.

Sir George shook his head.

"I expect to amuse them, myself," he said, with a grave unconsciousness of his own adequacy to perform that function.

"Then what do you want of me?" Ronald queried.

"Why, to eat, of course," Sir George made cannibalistic reply. "It will be at the Château at seven, the night after Christmas. There will be games in the drawing-room afterwards. You 'll let me count on you? There are not so many people here in town that I know," he added, with an unconscious note of pathos which smote rebukingly upon Ronald's ear.

"I 'll come, thanks," he responded cheerily; "I 'll make a point of being there. At seven, you say?"

But Sir George had lapsed into silence again, and sat with his jaw drooping, his eyes fixed

upon the hearth of the opposite stove. Once more Ronald's mind flashed up the stairs to his abandoned desk, and he was conscious of a swift desire to kindle a fire and turn on the draughts in the stove beneath his tranquil guest.

"I say, you have n't anyone you could bring; have you? Any woman?" Sir George queried suddenly.

With marvellous swiftness, Ronald regained his mental poise.

"My mother is not going out, just now," he replied.

"Oh; but she would be quite too old," Sir George rejoined. "Who else?"

"Who else what?" Ronald made blank answer.

"Who else could come?"

"But she could n't."

"Of course not. You said so. But who else could?" Sir George asked, with accentless persistency.

"I have a young sister," Ronald suggested dubiously. "She is n't out yet. In fact, she is only a child. And —"

"She 'll do," Sir George said placidly. Then he rose from his pedestal and, without another word, smoothed his gloves, grasped his stick and moved away in the direction of the door.

For the next three days, Janet Leslie gave her-

self over to unmitigated gloatings over the prospective feast. According to the fashion of young girlhood, granted a dinner and the fact of her being bidden, she cared little who was the host, or who her fellow guests. A dinner at the Château seemed to her a grown-up function, full of mysterious possibilities for all sorts of elegance, and she repined in secret over the fact that her only possible costume must be the plain black cloth frock which did duty for Sunday morning church. Janet's ideals would have included a sky-blue frock cut low and a nodding plume in her hair. She knew her mother too well, however, to suggest such dreams to Mrs. Leslie's unresponsive ear. In fact, it had taken some coaxing and much telephonic intercourse with Ronald's chief to coerce Mrs. Leslie into allowing Janet to accept the invitation in the first place.

The invitation once accepted, however, Janet gave herself over unreservedly to her golden dreams, and her mother, watching, forbore to check her young daughter's imagination. Truth to tell, Christmas would be a dreary little function in the Leslie household, that year; and, Mrs. Leslie's maternal fears regarding Sir George once allayed, she herself was ready to welcome this addition to the meagre Christmas pleasures she had been able to arrange.

By dint of careful economy and much planning, by help of Ronald's slender salary and the board-money of the Argyles, the Leslies could face the new year with a clean sheet of accounts. True, it had meant the invasion of their home by an alien family; it had meant the giving up to others their pleasantest rooms; it had meant a scrimping behind the scenes to make up for the apparent lavishness of the table, for the Argyles were hungry folk, and dainty withal, and only a small share of their money could go towards the general fund. Mrs. Leslie's hair had whitened beneath the strain, her brows had framed themselves in wrinkles. Nevertheless, the old year would leave them free from debt, and the new year could bring them no harder problems than those she had so lately faced. Looking to the past half-year, her mood was all of thankfulness that they had gone through it and come out so well. And yet, she would so have loved to be able to make the Christmas merry for her two children. Her third child, a daughter married and living in the States, was out of all this worry. In the midst of her general thanksgiving, Mrs. Leslie found time to rejoice in the joyous letters which had come to her, every week since her daughter's marriage, in early October.

To Janet, the Argyles' sudden departure for

Montreal had brought a mood of mingled joy and woe. It was a relief to escape for a few days out of the atmosphere of smothered war, to be able to laugh and gossip and to make merry with Ronald over their meals. It was also a relief not to have to sit by and watch Day's overflowing delight in the rich Christmas gifts which were bound to fall to her share. Janet Leslie, as a rule, was above all petty envyings. Nevertheless, she was human, and not quite fifteen. The darn in the front breadth of her every-day gown had never been quite so manifest as on the night when Day came down to dinner in her new tailor-made frock of Argyle plaid, with its kilted skirt and its wealth of thistle buttons. And, when she walked home from church to save her streetcar fare, it was exasperating to have to smile blithely in answer to Rob's hat, lifted from a passing sleigh where he and Day sat enthroned in a warm nest of furs. Day cast aside her Dent gloves at the first rubbing of the fingers. Janet darned her woollen mittens, and then darned the darns. And the time was not so very remote when she too had worn Dent gloves and driven in a fur-heaped sleigh. And the girls at school did pity her, and show their pity, too. The mother of one of them had even offered Mrs. Leslie an outgrown coat. The coat was trimmed with lamb, and it fitted. Mrs. Leslie had accepted it with

quiet gratitude. It now hung on a nail in the garret, and Janet wore her last-year one. It was dyed, and frayed on the cuffs, and narrow about the shoulder-blades. Nevertheless, it was her very own, not the offering of a benevolent, but tactless charity. It was her own, and she would wear it till water ran in the spring. She stated her resolution valiantly, and Ronald upheld her in it. Mrs. Leslie made no comment; but she felt a slight uneasiness, as she bethought herself of the dainty little fur-lined jacket which Mrs. Argyle had left in her keeping, when she went up to Montreal.

"I was getting one like it for Day," she had explained; "and I really could n't resist this. I am fond of Janet, you know; she is such a plucky little woman." And her parting kiss to Janet had given proof of her words.

Janet, her cheek still warm with the kiss, her ears still ringing with Rob's off-hand farewell, was surprised to find how still and empty the house seemed to her, after the stir of their going. Rob and Day had been late to two meals, that day; she herself had been absent from the third. Accordingly, she had not seen them since her talk with Ronald of the night before, and she had been altogether relieved when her mother's news of the trip to Montreal had made it plainly

evident that her dreaded apology must be postponed. She had expected to find unmixed pleasure in the sight of the Argyle backs. Instead of that, the house seemed dull and a bit lonesome.

To the young Leslies, Christmas passed quietly, with simple gifts and simpler feastings. To the young Argyles, it was a round of merry-making, gifts and goodies abounding, a long drive to make appetite for the elaborate dinner, and the theatre to wind up the day. It had been late, that night, when Rob and his sister had started to their rooms; but, even then, they had lingered long in the hall outside their doors, talking over the jolliest Christmas they had ever spent. Nevertheless, no trace of sleepiness was in Day's eyes, the next night, as she stood before the glass, dressing herself for Sir George's dinner.

In the eyes of grown-up womanhood, the dress of a young girl is a simple thing and of small account. The girl herself is of a wholly different impression. Day, screwing herself about to reach the hooks on the back of her yoke, shaking her shoulders to settle the yoke into place, tying her wide silk sash, then turning it around into its proper place and softly patting it into position, before clasping her beads around her neck; Day, adding the final touch of the brush and giving a last cock to the ribbon on her hair, was as

earnest, as absorbed in the process of beautifying herself as was ever a bud on the eve of her first reception. And, after all, the gown was only a plain white cloth with a little lace tucker which came softly about the base of her round young throat; the beads were only cairngorms set in silver, the gift of her grandmother far off in Scotland. The whole costume, though the work of skilful hands, was simple and girlish as the happy face above it. Nevertheless, Rob, coming into the room and halting at her side, bowed low in admiration half-mocking, half-sincere.

"Lovely vision!" he observed. "I like your shoes best; they 're so nice and shiny. Would that gown smash, if I hugged you?"

"Try it and see," she dared him.

But he backed off and brandished his stick.

"Not much! You would muss up my curls. Does my coat-tail hang right, and is my necktie becoming?" Gravely he turned himself about for approval, while Day mocked at him, though all the time convinced that few girls, Canadian or American, could produce so desirable a brother.

"What do you suppose is the row with the Leslies?" Rob asked, tranquilly dropping into a chair, as soon as the inspection was ended.

Day had been giving all her attention to a

refractory lock of hair. Now she faced about suddenly.

"Is Janet on her nerves again?" she demanded.

"Not nerves, exactly; at least, not as far as I am concerned. She is on the rampage, though, about something. She and Ronald appear to be going out somewhere together. She has been stamping around her room until I was afraid she would land down on my head through the ceiling. Once she came to the door and besought somebody to come and hook up her back, whatever that may mean."

"It probably means she could n't reach it, herself," Day interpreted calmly, as she patted her own yoke into more perfect adjustment. "Where is Ronald?"

"In his room, pumping his bureau drawers in and out as if he mistook them for an accordeon. His nerves are getting on him, I 'm afraid. He came in late, and took the stairs four at a time, shouting to Janet to hurry, or they 'd be late. It must be a citadel ball, at the very least, to inspire so much prinking. It 's a great thing to be a born Quebecker. There 's the carriage, ma'am. Where 's your cloak?" And he rose with the little deference which he showed, first of all, to the women of his own family.

In a snug little den at the northern end of the

long chain of drawing-rooms they found Sir George awaiting them, an impressive and elegant Sir George, whose manner seemed to have gained starch from the vast expanse of his evening linen. Even to Day's uncritical eye, he looked unnecessarily black and white, against the ruby-coloured room, whose plain red walls were dotted thickly with English racing prints. One table in a corner was heaped with games, flanked by a tray of bonbons which obviously held cracker caps beneath their gilt and silver rolls. The other table held a vast bran pie, surrounded by sundry knobby parcels which had defied Sir George's efforts to pack them within his Christmas pastry.

Sir George came forward to meet them hospitably, albeit his face showed misgivings.

"Oh, I say, how do you do?" he said. "How rummy you both look! But I fancy you're too early."

"You said seven; did n't you?" Rob asked, as he crumpled Sir George's fingers in his grasp.

"Yes; but the other fellow is n't here yet. It 's ten to, now. He 'll be here soon, I fancy. I told him he 'd better bring his sister. I thought you would have a better time, if I asked another girl," he added, turning to Day.

"Thank you. It will be better," she assented politely. "What a lovely room!"

"Yes. I told the fellow in the office that I must have it, for to-night. It will be good for the games, you know; and I can tell you stories about the pictures, by and by. That 's how we hunt in England, you know," Sir George explained, with unwonted energy.

"Yes, I remember," Day replied, as she crossed the room to look at a print on the opposite wall. "Look, Rob! That 's just the way it was at Copsley Heath. I was in England once," she added, facing about to include their host in the talk.

"Oh, no; I fancy not," he returned, with astounding irrelevance. "By George, here comes the other fellow, now!"

As he spoke, he stepped forward to greet his belated guests, while, on the opposite side of the room, Rob and Day waited, Rob's yellow hair and Day's white frock standing out sharply against the deep red background. Steps sounded in the hall, a uniformed boy led the way to the door, then moved aside to allow the guests to pass in before him. An instant later, Sir George was shaking hands with Ronald Leslie and Janet.

The silence which followed, utter, profound and of absolute stupefaction, was weighted with a meaning too strong for any words. Janet stared at Rob, Day at Ronald, while Sir George Porteous stared at all four of them in turn, stared and smiled in

pleased contentment with the scene. Then, just as the pause was growing too long for Sir George's perfect pleasure, just as there was dawning upon him the need to break it, Rob rallied from his stupefaction and dashed forward to meet the emergency.

"Hullo, old man!" he hailed Ronald, with disrespectful cordiality. "Delighted to see you! We had no notion that you were coming, too. Hullo, Janet! How stunning you look! I speak to take you out to dinner." Then, smiling broadly, he turned upon Sir George. "Why did n't you tell us," he demanded of his astonished host; "why did n't you tell us that you were going to treat us to a family party?"

And, in the burst of half-hysterical mirth which followed on Rob's words, Sir George Porteous lost his final fears for the success of his Christmas feast.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LATE the next afternoon, Rob found himself sliding away to the southward through the snow-heaped Townships. His departure had savoured of a diminutive ovation. Sir George had come sauntering up from the Château in time to see the sleigh drive away from the door, Ronald had left his office stool long enough to dash around to the ferry-house for a farewell handclasp, and, as a matter of course, Day had gone across with him and seen him settled in his car. Most of all, though, Rob had cared for Janet's tempestuous farewell. Invisible at lunch, she had remained invisible until the sleigh was at the door. Then, just as Rob had picked up his suitcase for the third time, she had come rushing down the stairs.

"Good-by, you nice old thing!" she said unsteadily. "And be sure you come back soon, able to take me snow-shoeing." And, as she spoke, she had crowded a little note into Rob's hand, outstretched in farewell.

The note was in his hand now. A vague respect for Janet's dumb mood had kept him from show-

ing it to Day, and it was not until he had come in from the rear platform and the little gray-coated figure had vanished from sight, that he had opened it and read the penitent, girlish words within. For a moment, he had sat with his eyes fixed unseeingly upon the ice-filled river and the frozen cone of Montmorency beyond. Then, turning about, he had hailed the conductor.

"Oh, it 's you; is it?" he said cheerily. "I 'm in luck to find you again. But tell me, can I send a telegram back from one of these metropolises?"

And Janet went to bed, that night, with peace in her conscience and Rob's telegram beneath her pillow.

Rob, meanwhile, had sat long, staring down at the little note in his hand, reading between its few short lines the things that Janet would not say. It had not been easy for her to write that note. Of so much he was certain. Under her demure exterior, she was high-spirited, imperious, a bit unyielding. Rob shook his head to himself. The note had been inspired by conscience; that was evident. Would her conscience, however, have been so active, had she not liked him in the first place? Rob adored Day. He also liked Janet, and he was surprised to find how anxious he was to hold her liking in return. Her very quickness won his admiration, and matched something which

at times came uppermost in his own mood. With Day first and foremost in his heart and life and interests, he yet had room in his affection for Janet, and he rejoiced unfeignedly, now that the long feud was ended. Two weeks in New York, and then they would slip back into their old good times!

Viewed in the light of the previous evening and of his hearty good-by, even Ronald seemed more attractive, more interesting and infinitely more alive. It had been Ronald, the night before, who had rushed into the breach at Rob's heels. Sir George, blandly unconscious that anything had ever been amiss, was fussing about the table where his Christmas pie was baking, and the two girls had been as if stricken dumb. It was upon Rob and Ronald, then, that the stress of the next ten minutes had fallen, and Ronald had played his part like a man, played it so valiantly that, by the time the waiter came to announce the dinner, the last of the ice had melted, and an hilarious, wholly friendly quartette had followed Sir George down the great dining-room to the table spread before the fire-place at the farther end. Later, too, much later, it had been Ronald, quiet and dignified no longer, who had assisted Sir George in the carving of the Christmas pie.

Even now, Rob could scarcely trust his own

memory, as he recalled the droll and freakish comments with which the tall Canadian had drawn forth the odd assortment of budgets from within. For the hour, Rob had been quite willing to watch the course of events from a back seat. Up to then, he had had no notion that Ronald Leslie's mind held any trace of skittish humour. Now he began to doubt. And, in the intervals, he watched Janet whose plain black frock and demure manner were powerless to conceal her overflowing spirits. Later still, Rob had gone to the piano and pounded out a rag-time melody, linked to strange, sad chords that moaned away among the bass, and the little red room had echoed with laughter at Day's efforts to teach Sir George to dance with the American ease and swing. The laughter was still in the air, when the Argyles' sleigh had been announced; and it had been at Ronald's suggestion, not Rob's, that they had packed themselves into it, Sir George and all, and gone for a moonlight turn out the Grande Allée and home again by Saint John Street. It was late for the girls; but what matter? Such things happen only once a year; perhaps, in all their details, only once a lifetime. And Janet had sat on her brother's knee, and Sir George had been huddled down on the floor of the sleigh among all their feet; and the very moon had laughed, gazing down upon the merry load of youngsters,

as they went driving away out of the Château court.

And now, as the early twilight cast its long blue shadows across the snow, Rob was sliding southward, and the old gray city on the cliff was growing vague as the shadow of a happy dream.

"You 've had enough of winter?"

Rob glanced up. The Pullman conductor, his duties done, was sitting down in the section across the aisle.

"No; worse luck! I hate to leave it."

"And you have to?"

"I must. I 'm in for two weeks of the doctor."

"Not worse?" Both voice and eyes were wholly kind.

"No; better, a good deal. I 've gained, ever since I went up there. My man told me to come back to him for some more treatment, and I 'm bound to go. I hate it, though."

"You like the place?"

"New York?" Rob queried.

"No; of course, one likes that. I mean Quebec."

Rob recalled his glance from the row of coon-coated habitants on the platform of a wayside station, and gave terse answer.

"I adore it."

His companion laughed.

"We don't often hear you Americans speak so

warmly of us. We like it, too. By the way, do you remember the Englishman I carried down, the day you came?"

"Down?" Rob echoed blankly.

"Down to Quebec. I mean the fellow with the accent and the luggage. I met him in the street, the other night."

Rob nodded.

"He 's still there; I 've seen him often. He is a living joke; but he 's done me one or two good turns." And, as the conductor rose to go his busy way, Rob lost himself in wondering what was happening, just then, inside the Leslie home.

Supper was happening just then; and, quite naturally, the conversation was following the traveller to the southward. Mrs. Argyle was full of talk and of maternal worries; but Day was uncommonly still. It seemed so strange, when she raised her eyes from her plate, not to find Rob's yellow head opposite her, not to meet the laugh in his honest, keen blue eyes. She wondered if he would find the good-night letter she had tucked into a corner of his suitcase, folded in the tissue-paper nightcap which she had brought away from Sir George's party.

As she left the table, and started up the stairs to her own room, uncertain whether to read one of her Christmas books, or to indulge in a good, comfortable cry, Ronald hailed her from below.

"Whither?" he asked.

"Upstairs."

"But why? Come and frolic on the terrace with Janet and me. There 's a splendid moon."

His accent was inviting; his smile was more so. Day's step stayed itself.

"Are you sure you want me?" she asked irresolutely.

"Sure. Else we 'd not be asking you."

Day took swift note of the friendly tact which had included Janet in the invitation. Then she sent a thought hurrying after Rob, a hasty wonder whether he could count it disloyal to him that, the moment he was away from her, she should so naturally turn to Ronald for companionship. Then scornfully she dismissed the wonder. By this time, Rob knew her too well to doubt her loyalty. Had the past two months existed solely for the purpose of welding the brother and sister together, they would yet have been worth the while. Rob gone, there was no especial sense in her shutting herself up to pindle and pine over his absence.

"Thank you," she said. "I 'll go."

Half the Quebec world was out upon the terrace, that night. From far up on the glacis beneath the King's Bastion, the long toboggan slide stretched steeply down, then cut its level way across the terrace to the very feet of the Sieur de Champlain at

the northern end. Between the gleaming chains of electric lights, the double lines of toboggans were charging down the slope and out upon the level course below, while, from the gay groups mounting the steps or gathered waiting at the top of the slides, light talk and laughter came floating down to mingle with the strident buzz of the toboggans and the shriller cries of their excited freight. Along the surface of the wide, ice-dotted river beneath, long banners of white trailed down from the lights of Levis. Far down the northern channel, the clustered dots of light marked the foot of Montmorency Falls, while, faint in the purple distance, yet another huddle of lights showed the spot where the faithful, even in the heart of winter, keep watch and ward over the sacred shrine of the Good Sainte Anne. And above it all, more dazzling than all, the round white winter moon rode proudly upward across a cloud-flecked sky.

Six times, Ronald brought his toboggan to the top of the slide and settled the two girls comfortably in their places. Six times, they made the breathless, swooping flight downward, the long, ecstatic course out across the level. Six times, their ears drummed with the grinding hum of the toboggan, their pulses beat with the thrill of excitement, their cheeks glowed with the impact of the cold, still air. Then, as the toboggan slowly lost

its impetus and came to a halt, Janet, springing to her feet, was surrounded with an eager group of her schoolmates.

"Come down with us," they begged.

Janet shook her head.

"Just this once," they pleaded.

Janet spoke to Ronald; but she looked at Day.

"Would you mind so very much?" she asked dubiously.

Ronald laughed.

"Glad to have you. It will give us just so much more room. Come, Day, we 'll race them to the top of the slide." And presently they were once more skimming the surface of the terrace, past the bandstand, past the guns, past the entrance to the Château court, and on and on until Ronald steered the toboggan sharply to one side, to avoid hitting the rail at the extreme northern end of the terrace.

Day laughed, as she scrambled to her feet.

"The farthest yet!" she commented. "It is such glorious fun. Why have n't I tried it before?"

"The slide is only just ready. This is the second night it has been lighted. Do you know, I should think Rob could go in for this."

"Except for the climb back up the slide; he never could do that, not this winter, at least." As she spoke, she stepped forward and stood leaning on the rail.

"How long do you think —" Ronald said, as he joined her there.

Swiftly she interrupted him.

"Ronald, I don't know. Sometimes, I think it won't be long, think it does n't amount to much; sometimes, I get desperate. It 's a cruel game, that football; it has done harm enough, even if Rob does take it all as a grand joke. Down underneath, I know he has hated it, all this last year, the being out of things. And it is so slow. We hoped that six months more would see him out of it."

Ronald spoke slowly, his eyes on the far-off cluster of tiny lights.

"What a plucky chap he is! I wish I had half of his grit."

"Perhaps there are two sorts," Day answered gently.

"You mean?"

She looked up at him and, as her brown eyes rested upon his, something in their expression reminded him of that far-away day when they had gone to the fort at Levis.

"I mean that there are other hurts besides those one gets in football."

"Yes," he assented slowly. "Yes, there are."

"And that it takes fully as much pluck to meet them."

"Yes," he assented again. "Yes, it does."

Then there came a little pause between them, and the pause lengthened. Under its spell, the voices on the slide behind them grew faint and indistinct, and the strident hum of many toboggans lost itself in the throbbing beat of the little ferry-boat just swinging out into the stream. Suddenly Day spoke.

"Ronald," she asked; "do you remember that day at Levis?"

"I was just thinking about it," he replied.

"So was I, and I 've been ashamed of myself, while I thought."

"Ashamed, Day?"

"Yes, ashamed," she answered vehemently. "No, wait. Let 's talk it out. We did talk it out, that day; at least, a little bit. You told me then how you had had to give up college and all that, how you had had to start fresh and make your own way. I told you then that I knew you 'd do it, that no one of your friends would be gladder about it than I."

"And would they?" he questioned, as she came to a dead halt.

She made a little gesture of despair.

"I 'm afraid they would; at least, if you can tell anything from the way I 've treated you. I 've been horrid, Ronald, when I might have helped."

"But — "

Impetuously she interrupted him.

"There is n't any *but*. When you told me, that day, I did n't think much about it, what it all must mean. Since then, you 've told me more; I 've seen the rest. I know now, how you 've scrimped and saved and worked and gone without things, so that — "

"But I have n't," he broke in sturdily.

"Yes; I 've watched you. I know when you are worried and tired; I knew what it meant, when you gave up the Snowshoe Club."

Under the electric light above their heads, she could see the colour rushing to his cheeks.

"You 're talking nonsense, Day."

"It may be nonsense; but it is the truth," she retorted fearlessly. "I have n't lived in the house with you for three whole months, without learning to know you a little bit. And I know one thing more."

"And that?" he queried, supplying the question for which her pause was plainly asking.

"And that is, that, when you were carrying all this care and work and worry, I 'd much better have stuck to you and been friends and helped you to frivol and forget things, when you could. Instead of that, I lost my temper and sulked and let you alone. I 'm sorry, Ronald, sorry and ashamed.

I won't do it any more. Let 's shake hands on it, and then, if you want to scold me afterwards, I 'll give you leave." And she held out her hand to him, with a glance which was half-whimsical and wholly appealing.

Ronald pulled off his mittens and took the outstretched hand.

"We 'll let the scolding go, Day," he answered. "I did hate the row, though. Still, it is over now; and I fancy the old days are going to come again."

But Day shook her head.

"Like last fall?" she questioned. "Never."

Ronald's face fell.

"Why not?" he asked slowly.

Gently she took away her hand, and stood for a moment with her eyes resting on the southern hills.

"Because," she answered, and her voice was full of her content; "because then there was n't any Rob."

"Oh, dear!" Janet's voice sounded in their ears. "I wish you 'd stop mooning there beside the rail, and talk to me. I 'm lonesome."

"You should n't have deserted us, then," Ronald said, as he linked his arm in hers.

She made a little grimace of disgust.

"I wish I had n't. Those children don't know how to steer · they landed me on my nose in front

of the statue. I bit the dust and scraped the skin off my elbow. Why are n't you sliding ?"

"We stopped to talk."

"Evidently." Janet sniffed disdainfully. "I should think you might talk enough in the house, and not waste this gorgeous moonlight. What were you talking about ?"

"Rob."

Janet spun about to face Day.

"Oh, were you ? And I was thinking about him. Just before I went off the toboggan, I hit upon the loveliest idea."

"Most likely that was what upset the toboggan, Janet," Ronald suggested unkindly. "What was the idea."

"Let 's write to Sidney."

"She owes me a letter now."

"Well, I owe her one, so we 're even. But I mean about Rob."

"What about him ?"

"That he 's there."

"Sidney will be thrilled," Ronald said dryly, for, all the last weeks of the previous summer, he had been accustomed to regard Sidney Stayre as his own particular comrade, and he had no especial desire to admit others to the comradeship.

Janet gave a little stamp of sheer impatience.

"Don't tease, Ronald. Else, I 'll be cross," she

warned him. Then she turned to Day. "Don't you think it would be good?" she asked. "Sidney lives there and she is a darling. She would love to know Rob, because he's been with us, all winter, and could tell her all the news, all the things there is n't time to write. She would ask him to see her, and make it ever so nice for him."

"Steady, Janet!" Ronald laid a brotherly hand upon her shoulder, as there came a pause in her eager speech. "Remember that Rob has been in New York always, and has his own friends there. He most likely does n't need to have you find him any new ones."

However, to Ronald's surprise, Day ranged herself on Janet's side.

"It's a good idea, Janet. Write to Sidney, as soon as you can. Rob is bound to be lonely. He is going to be in the hospital, where he can have treatment, every day, and that will take him miles and miles from where we live. Most of his friends are away at school, anyway, and he has n't told a soul he is to be in town. You write to Sidney, in the morning; and I 'll send a note to Rob, to look out for a message from her." Then she turned back to Ronald. "Come," she said; "shall we have one more last slide, before it gets too late?" And, with a Leslie upon either hand, she went back into the heart of the throng.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LESS than a week later, tragedy befell Ronald Leslie. It befell by way of Famille Street hill and a dust-covered streak of ice, and it sent him home to nurse a sprained wrist. The tragedy took place at noon of Saturday. On Sunday morning, just as the boom of the Basilica bells came crashing down across the clean, cold air, Sir George Porteous mounted the Leslie steps, and asked to see Ronald.

"Good morning," he greeted his host. "I heard you were ill, you know. I thought you'd be in bed."

His accent was rebuking. For reply, Ronald held up his bandaged wrist.

"This is all the damage. But how did you hear?"

"At dinner, last night."

"Oh, you dined with the chief?"

"Yes, he invited me," Sir George made level answer. "He told me you were injured."

Ronald laughed.

"He told the truth. I'm injured in my body and my pocket."

Sir George sat gazing up at him with wrinkled brow. Ronald, tall and hearty and handsome, as he stood leaning against the mantel, was scarcely the sort of invalid Sir George had expected to find.

"You had your hand in your pocket?" he queried at length.

"No. I laid it down in front of me and fell down on top of it."

"You must be very heavy," Sir George made thoughtful comment.

"I am, amazingly."

Sir George's voice took on a minor key.

"I am very sorry. It must have hurt you."

"It did, like the deuce," Ronald responded fervently.

"I am really sorry." Sir George's voice, accentless though it was, yet left no doubt of his sincerity. "I have n't many friends here, you know, and it makes a fellow sorry, when one of them gets hurt. Will it last you long?"

"A week or so." Ronald crossed the room and flung himself into a chair. "That's the beastly part of it."

"Is it so very painful?"

"No; but it knocks me out of going to the office."

Sir George leaned back in his chair and straightened out his legs.

"I should n't think you 'd mind," he said placidly.

"But I do."

"Mind missing the chance of sitting on a stool?"

Ronald coloured.

"Mind not getting paid for it," he answered briefly.

"Oh; but they don't pay a fellow enough to count for much," Sir George reminded him.

"It counts to me," Ronald answered still more briefly. "I need the money."

Sir George drew off his glove, drew out his handkerchief, then paused with the handkerchief suspended in mid-air.

"Need the money for what, old man?" he asked, and there was an indescribable kindliness in his voice which Ronald found it hard to resent.

"Need it to run things," he replied carelessly. "I am a family man, Sir George."

Slowly Sir George shook his head.

"I am afraid I don't understand," he said vaguely.

Ronald gave one comprehensive glance at the figure before him.

"No," he said then; "I 'm afraid you don't."

There came a long, long silence, while Sir George

appeared to be communing with himself. Suddenly he looked up.

"I say," he said alertly; "would you be able to go for a drive? You could have a cushion and things, and it 's a jolly sort of day."

Ronald hesitated. While he was hesitating, his mother came into the room, and Sir George sprang to his feet.

"I did n't suppose the fellow had it in him," Ronald said, late that night.

"You can't tell, by looking at a toad, how far he 'll hop," Day quoted succinctly, from her seat across the room.

And Janet added, —

"And every clown has his sober minutes."

But Ronald shook his head.

"Not all clown, either. He may not be a genius; but he 's a good-hearted little chap, and, once he gets to talking, he has an occasional idea."

"Semi-occasional, you mean," Day corrected him.

Ronald, however, was on the defensive.

"Anyway, he was the first person to come to ask after my broken bones," he retorted. "That is something, and I was glad when the mater was inspired to be nice to him."

"Were n't we all nice to him?" Janet interposed. "I let him sit in Rob's place, and put the

sugar in his tea. Day showed him pictures, and Mrs. Argyle made up some sort of an acquaintance with his step-mother. What more could you ask?"

Mrs. Argyle glanced up from her book. Day had coaxed the two young Leslies into her sitting-room where she sat reading and contributing an occasional phrase to the talk.

"I did n't have to make it up, Janet. I knew Lady Dudsworth well; she was very nice to me, the first time I was in England. I remember this boy, for he was a boy then; but I had forgotten his name."

"How old is he?" came in duet from Day and Janet.

But Mrs. Argyle pursued her own train of thought.

"Lady Dudsworth is a delightful woman. It seems that she gave Sir George a letter to me in New York. For her sake, I should like to be kind to him."

Day shook her head.

"Then, after all, it is another case of *Kismet*," she said whimsically. "We met in the fort at Levis. Remember, Ronald? And Rob met him in the train. Now what do you propose to do about it all?"

"Make it as pleasant for him as I can," Mrs. Argyle said decidedly.

"Mother! That monkey!"

Mrs. Argyle smiled.

"Too late, Day! As Rob said, you've eaten his salt."

But Day protested.

"I don't see what that has to do with it. Besides, it was Rob, not I, who accepted the invitation. He's funny; I like to hear him talk. Still, he drives me frantic, he is so immortally futile. Think of him, mother, beside our Rob!"

And, in spite of herself, Mrs. Argyle laughed, as she made answer, —

"Day, I can't."

However, Ronald had the last word.

"He may be futile, and he may be funny," he said. "Still, as I said, he is a good-hearted little chap; and, between you and the chief, Mrs. Argyle, we have proved that he's socially sound. You girls can do as you like; but, for my part, I hope he'll come again."

Sir George did come again, and yet again. Under his languid, futile exterior, he had a heart that was singularly human and boyish; and his heart had been touched by the welcome accorded him at the Sunday night supper which had followed their drive. Sent out from England in deference to the general theory that a potential heir should see something of the colonies before settling down

for life in the home kingdom, Sir George had been a lonely British stranger in a strange French city. Somewhere in the core of his being was a fervent love of children and of home. His Christmas party had testified to the one; his eager acceptance of Mrs. Leslie's invitation had borne witness to the other.

Even Ronald had been surprised at Sir George, that night at supper. Shining social success he would never be; but, under the friendly questionings of Mrs. Leslie, somewhat of his vacant futility had dropped from him, and he had told her of his home life, speaking with a simple dignity which was new to all their eyes. It was then that Mrs. Argyle had made her discovery of his kinship to Lady Dudsworth, and, in the talk which followed, Sir George had wakened into something resembling a normal man. Funny he was and would be, consummately funny. Nevertheless, when he said good night and went his way, he left behind him an impression of gentle breeding and kindly thoughtfulness which went far to atone for his mental eccentricities.

"I hope you'll be better soon," he said, as he shook Ronald's hand in parting. "Perhaps I may look in on you again, you know, to see if you are feeling fit."

He did look in, the very next afternoon. Before

that, however, he journeyed down into Saint Paul Street in search of Ronald's chief.

One of the minor clerklets found him there, straying aimlessly about among the stoves, rescued him and escorted him to the official sanctum. Sir George tapped on the door, then walked in.

"Good morning!" he observed.

The chief looked up.

"Good morning, Sir George! Glad to see you," he said crisply. "Excuse me for one moment. Then I'll be with you."

"Oh, no hurry!" Sir George answered calmly. "I've the whole morning, you know."

For one moment, and for two, the chief wrote busily. Then he whirled about in his chair with a suddenness which caused Sir George to start and draw up his feet in alarm.

"Well, what can I do for you?" The tone was brisk, alert.

"I came to have a talk."

"Not to go into the business?"

Hurriedly Sir George shook his head.

"No. Oh, no. I fancied we had settled that already."

"What then?"

Sir George's reply came with unexpected directness.

"I came to talk about young Leslie."

"What about him?"

"He has broken his bone."

"Sprained it. Yes. I told you. What then?"

"The fellow says he needs some money."

The other man frowned.

"And sent you to ask for it?" he inquired sharply. "That 's not like Leslie."

The glass fell with a click.

"He did n't send me. I came," Sir George explained. "It 's not just now he needs it. I fancy it is all the time. At least, he said so. What do you suppose the fellow meant?"

"He probably meant what we all know: that they have had severe reverses, and that he is short of money."

"But what should a fellow like that want of money?"

"To live on."

Sir George pondered.

"For coals and things?" he asked presently.

"Yes."

"By George!" He shook his head. "By George! A fellow like young Leslie! That 's hard lines." Then he looked up, and a sudden determination added lustre to his eyes. "Of course you pay him his salary, now he 's ill?" he demanded.

"As a rule, we pay half."

Sir George stiffened slightly.

"Oh, I think you'd best pay him the whole," he said.

"But it's not according to our rule."

Sir George blundered upon an epigram.

"Rules are made to be broken," he said. Then, quite unexpectedly, he rose to his feet. "Oh, I say," he remarked persuasively then; "Leslie's a good fellow. You told me so, yourself. He's down on his luck, you know. You'd best give him all his money. He can't live on half a coal, such weather as this. Just give it to him, and, by George," Sir George added in one tremendous outburst; "if your shop is going to suffer, I'll come down here and sit on a stool half of his time, myself." And, his face wrinkled heavily from the unaccustomed shutting of his jaw, Sir George Porteous marched out of the office and neglected to close the door behind him.

"But I like young Leslie," he said to himself, as he turned away down the street. "He's a good fellow, and he's not always chaffing one. It's a brute of a thing to be wanting money, you know. A fellow would almost do his work for him, to save him that."

And, filled with a vague desire to make some contribution to the Leslie resources, Sir George betook himself to the florist shop and ordered violets sent to Mrs. Leslie.

The end of the following week found Ronald back at the deserted desk which Sir George had threatened to occupy in his stead. With rare self-control, the chief omitted to make known the details of his call from Sir George. Nevertheless, a week later, he summoned Ronald to his private room.

"You are quite worth it to me," he said kindly, at the conclusion of their talk; "and I fancy it won't come amiss to you. You are carrying a heavy care, for so young a man. No; don't thank me. I'll get it back out of you, in the shape of work. You have proved that you are the man for the place. By the way," he added casually; "Sir George Porteous says he is seeing a good deal of you."

Ronald laughed.

"Yes, he's at the house rather often. He and my mother are getting to be great friends. He's not a bad little chap; he's only funny."

The older man nodded.

"You're right. He has good blood, and that tells, in the end. I knew his father. Make it as pleasant for the fellow as you can. You won't be sorry." And he gave a curt, kind nod of dismissal.

In talking to his chief, Ronald had spoken truly. His mother and Sir George Porteous were getting to be great friends, fast friends. In fact, during the past ten days, Sir George's calls had been fre-

quent. He had ended by dropping in to see them all, usually appearing simultaneously with the tray and sitting out his second cup of tea. In the beginning, however, his calls had been for Ronald, and for him alone, for the tall, ruddy-faced Canadian appeared to have won the little Englishman's whole heart. Sir George himself would have found scant difficulty in accounting for this sudden liking. Accustomed all his life long to be the butt of ill-suppressed mirth, Ronald's grave courtesy, albeit superficial and hard to maintain, had won his undying gratitude. Sir George, as a rule, was just shrewd enough to discover that there usually was a joke about, when he was present; but to be quite unable to determine where the point of the joke might lie. He had liked Rob Argyle; but Rob's whole manner to him had been suggestive of a veiled and elusive form of chaff. Ronald, however, had treated him with a portentous seriousness, and Sir George's gratitude directed itself accordingly. It was as well, perhaps, that Sir George had no inkling of the real thoughts which underlay the superficial gravity of Ronald Leslie.

Nevertheless, Ronald had been touched by the true kindliness of Sir George's initial call. Later on, he admitted to himself, in the intervals of his mirth, a sound respect for the little Englishman whose heart was palpably so superior to his head.

And to them all, Ronald included, it was equally palpable that that heart had been given over wholly to the long Canadian. Janet Sir George treated exactly as he would have treated a telephone, could he have so far recovered from his London conservatism as to treat that instrument with anything bordering upon familiarity. Day, on the other hand, he viewed with exceeding interest and curiosity.

"I suppose it's because you're American, you know, that makes you so very brisk," he said, one day. "You get about so fast that a fellow never knows where he'll find you next, and you talk as fast as you get about. I get quite tired, trying to keep up with you." And, puffing noisily, Sir George halted his snowshoes and turned his back to the wind.

It might well have tired a sturdier man than Sir George Porteous to keep pace with Day Argyle, in those last weeks of January. The charm of the Canadian winter was upon her. Furred to her ear-tips, a plaid tam o'shanter hat cocked cornerwise upon her head, and Scotch plaid leggings covering her from her heels to the hem of her short kilted skirt, Day Argyle was to be seen abroad in sunshine and in storm. She defied all weathers, all temperatures. Hardy, happy, glowing with contentment and with exercise, she spent

long hours in the open air, walking, driving, or sliding, according to the state of the weather and to the wish of her companion of the moment. With Janet and on snowshoes, she scoured the surrounding country, wandering to and fro across the old battleground until she could tell to a nicety where Wolfe's line of march deviated from the easiest trail. Under Ronald's teaching, she learned the trick of taking her toboggan down every slide in the region. She taught herself skiing and, once she succeeded in training her own feet to await her signal for starting down the slopes of the Cove Fields, she set about teaching the same lesson to the feet of Sir George Porteous. As pupil, Sir George was less apt than enthusiastic. He had a trick of allowing his skis to run away with him, and Day, after he had picked himself out of a drift for the twentieth time, abandoned the attempt.

The daylight hours were far too few for the girl's enjoyment. Night after night, she and Janet and Ronald pushed back their chairs from the table and, stopping only for their wraps and the toboggan, betook themselves to the terrace. Or else, slinging their snowshoes on their backs, they hailed a car for the toll-gate whence they started for a long cross-country tramp, over the level fields glistening white in the moonlight, along the crest of the cliff above the gleaming river, then on and

on through the trees, until Sillery Point was behind them and the stillness of the winter night was unbroken by any human sound. And the evening always ended with a row of chairs drawn up before the blazing fire at home, while they ate the supper which Mrs. Leslie had made ready for their coming. And always, before the evening was ended, one of the young voices was sure to say wishfully,—

"If only Rob were here!"

To Day Argyle, Rob's absence was the one faulty spot in her life. Otherwise, just then, she was perfectly content. She missed her brother at every turn, missed him, to her surprise, far more acutely with each passing day. Her old-time friendship with Ronald had renewed itself completely. Their companionship was closer, their understanding of each other better than it had ever been before. In the long winter evenings, in the golden Saturday afternoons, Ronald did with her all the things she had so often longed to do with Rob. Day entered into all his plans with zest. She enjoyed them wholly; she was perfectly aware that, in her gay, care-free society, Ronald was forgetting some part at least of the worries which were cramping him at every turn. If it were all she could do for him, this making him forget things and be jolly, at least, she would

do it with all her might. Doing it, moreover, it was impossible for her to keep from glorying in the strength and vigorous beauty of her companion, in the constant, brotherly care for her comfort which he lavished upon her. Day came in from their long expeditions, eager, alert, happy, to find the final pleasure missing. If only she could have talked it all over afterwards with Rob! Ronald, in those days, was a continual pleasure and delight; Rob was a part of her very self. Between the lines of his frequent letters, she sought to read the assurance that he mourned for her as she for him.

And then, one day in early February, Sir George Porteous came to ask Day to go snow-shoeing. There was an instant of hesitation in her acceptance of the invitation, as she glanced out at the sour gray sky which hung low above the rocky cape. It was not a day to tempt one out. Nevertheless, Day bethought herself that, with Janet in school and her mother in Montreal for the night, time was bound to hang heavy on her hands. Sir George's face was wishful; she was indifferent. As result, she went.

For the first half hour, all was well. Sir George was extraordinarily expert in the management of his shoes, extraordinarily likable in his mood of half-homesick confidence. Glowing

and warm with the brisk exercise, Day forgot somewhat of the sourness of the sky; and, as they halted to rest at the foot of the *Aux Braves* monument, she was wholly glad that she had ventured forth. Then, of a sudden, troubles began. Sir George attempted to tighten the thong of one of his shoes, lost his mitten in the process, lost off his other shoe in hunting for his mitten. And, meanwhile, Day, waiting there beside the monument, felt her warm glow fast changing to a clammy chill, as the wind came sweeping up, bleak and cold, from the bare mud flats which border the Saint Charles, when the tide is low. She waited long and patiently, until Sir George was once more shod and mittened. Then she stepped forward to the trail.

"Come," she said. "Shall we go on?"

Sir George surveyed her anxiously.

"I say, you aren't cold, are you?" he asked. "You really look quite blue, you know."

She forced herself to laugh a little.

"No; I am all right. I shall be warm as soon as we are stirring again. Suppose we hurry. It is growing late."

But not all the hurry in the world could force the chill out of Day's tired bones. She stumbled a little, and her teeth were chattering, as she mounted the steps at home.

"Then she stepped forward to the trail." *Page* 276.

All that evening and all that night, she was hot and cold, cold and hot by turns; but, even in the heat, she could still feel that bleak, bleak wind blowing upward from the Saint Charles valley. And then, just as the little travelling clock on the table struck three, she suddenly pulled the sheet over her head and began to cry, cry silently, piteously, lonesomely for Rob. And Rob was in New York, too far away to hold her shivering, aching body in his strong, warm grasp.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AND, meanwhile, Rob was biding his time in New York as best he might. He had left Quebec, expecting to stay for two weeks. He had remained for five. However, he had made haste to assure his mother and Day that the unexpected delay portended good things rather than bad. In spite of falls and exposures and strains, his gain had been faster than the doctor had led him to anticipate, so fast, in fact, that certain daily treatment which he had expected to take in June, could be given now. A little patience, a little pain and a good deal of boredom, to say nothing of the loss of a winter he had been learning to enjoy, and then a return to them all in something approaching his normal condition! His letters were long and full of enthusiasm over his improvement. By the end of the second week, they even contained veiled hints of a possible return, next season, to his school eleven, at least as substitute.

However, the fact remained and would not down that at heart Rob was undeniably homesick for Quebec and for Day. Up till then, it had never

occurred to him that he could grow so fond of any girl; anyway, not until his joints were too stiff to permit of football. Now that his hopes of future football were brightening, he felt an imperative need to talk them over with Day, to invoke her influence to wheedle his father into allowing him to venture into the old-time sport. Besides, he wanted to hear Day tell about her own doings. Three times in every week, the postman brought him a fat, violet-sealed letter; and Rob, during his daily hours of massage, learned to know those letters by heart. So characteristic were they that he could almost hear certain of their phrases falling from Day's tongue. They were full of news of the Leslies, of her own experiences, of the words and ways of Sir George Porteous for whose increasing prominence upon the Leslie-Argyle horizon Rob was entirely at a loss to account. And, intermingled with all these things, there were bits of phrases full of girlish affection, and it was upon these that Rob lingered longest. With a strange, iron-handed woman rubbing and pounding and bending at his weary knee, putting it through its daily woes in a chilly, impersonal fashion that took no notice of the human being to whom it was attached, it was a comfort to lie back and clasp his hands behind the nape of his neck and think how much better Day would have done it all, how her fingers

would have lightened their attacks, now and then, when the needful rubbing brought the scarlet to his cheeks and forced a muffled "Ow!" from his plucky lips. Rob Argyle dreaded but one thing more than his daily massage. That was his daily masseuse.

In the intervals of her more strenuous operations, Rob pondered upon the Leslies. Too bad he had been forced to leave the field, just as the long war was ended! It would have been interesting to have watched the reconciliation work itself out, until peace was established upon the old terms. At least, it had been bound to come. Sir George's party had settled that. Day's letters, too, confirmed the fact. They were full of her out-door life with Ronald and Janet; and one scarcely went sliding, three nights a week, with people with whom one was not on perfect terms. It was plain enough to Rob, lying on his back and thinking the matter over, that the Leslies were doing all in their power to make amends for the past. After all her tantrums, Janet was a good little soul; and even Ronald had more backbone than Rob at first had been inclined to acknowledge. And how handsome he was! And how increasingly shabby! There had been a patch on the side of his shoe, the day he had come to see Rob off. Quite inconsequently, Rob fell to wondering how it would seem to be buying neckties at a midwinter clearance sale.

"Come in."

"Is Mr. Argyle here?" a courteous and wholly unknown voice inquired.

Rob struggled to a sitting posture, regardless of the grip of the masseuse who hung on his knee as if resolved to hold it firm, even though it parted company with the rest of his anatomy.

"Confound you, do let go for a minute!" he bade her, wholly forgetting, so impersonal had been her ministrations, that he was addressing a woman. "Can't you see I want to speak to somebody? Come in. I thought it was the bell-boy with the letters. I'm Rob Argyle."

The stranger pushed open the door, disclosing to view a slender, dark-eyed man a little on the younger side of thirty. His voice was attractive; still more attractive was his smile, which gave a sudden lighting to an otherwise grave face.

"I hope I'm not intruding," he said genially, as he came forward into the room.

Rob laughed, though with a sudden desire to wring the neck of his masseuse, who had once more shut her hands upon the knee before her.

"Not if you don't mind watching the after effects of football," he answered as cordially as he was able. "As a rule, I don't receive calls at this stage of the game. How did they happen to let you up here?"

"They sent a boy to show me the way. Don't mind me, though." The stranger laughed a little, as Rob indulged in dumb but expressive comments behind his persecutor's unconscious back. "Ronald Leslie wrote me you were lying up for repairs, and asked me to look you up. I am Wade Winthrop. We were with the Leslies, all last summer."

"Oh, Sidney Stayre's cousin!" Rob made involuntary comment. Then abruptly he caught himself up. "I've heard Ronald speak of you so often," he added more conventionally.

This time, the guest permitted himself to laugh aloud.

"Don't worry," he said. "When you've seen Sidney, you'll know that I don't mind being called her cousin. May I sit down? Ronald's letter was here, a week ago; but I've been out of town. I came back, last night, and Sidney sent me down this morning. Do they let you out at all; or how is she going to see you?"

Rob's answer came promptly. Already he liked the stranger, already felt that kinship which comes from tastes and training rather than from blood. It had taken Rob Argyle exactly five minutes to discover that Wade Winthrop was of his world. It took him five minutes more to discover that he wished to see more, very much more, of this grave-eyed man with the sunny smile.

"I belong to the day-shift," he answered whimsically. "I have my evenings off. Now and then, too, I get half-holiday."

"That 's good. When will you come and dine?"

"Where?"

"Up town, with my aunt, Mrs. Stayre. There are hordes of young Stayres, who are sub-angelic; but there is also Sidney."

"And you?" Rob queried, a bit too directly for complete courtesy.

The guest coloured.

"I am always at Sidney's apron-string," he made laughing answer. "May we count on you for day after to-morrow?"

"I 'd be delighted. Now just sit still. This performance is nearly over, and then we can talk, unless you 'd like a turn." And, as the masseuse straightened her back and marched out of the room, Rob shook himself into a dressing-gown, pulled up a chair and settled himself at his ease. "I feel a bit more self-respecting, don't you know," he explained then.

His guest nodded.

"What did it?"

"Exeter-Andover game," Rob made terse answer.

The older man looked at him keenly.

"I was at Exeter, myself. Are you the Argyle who saved the game, a year ago?"

Rob sought to keep his voice in check.

"That 's what they say," he answered nonchalantly.

The other's face lighted. He held out his hand with a gesture full of boyish enthusiasm.

"I 'm not of the athletic crowd, myself," he said heartily. "I know my share of lying up; but you — By Jove, I don't know but it was almost worth your while!"

Rob's laugh but half concealed his satisfaction.

"You don't agree with Leslie, then?" he asked.

"How is that?"

"He thinks that football is a rough, naughty game, and that it served me right that I was hurt in playing it." Rob's voice, however, was free from all malice.

Wade Winthrop smiled.

"You never can get an Englishman into the spirit of our American sports," he said. "But, as for Ronald Leslie, even if he does n't go in for football, he is all a man."

"Yes," Rob admitted rather grudgingly. "Of a sort."

"Of a mighty good sort," the other returned. "He 's not like our men; but he 's no Miss Nancy. In fact, he did fully his own share in pulling me up and setting me on my feet, last summer."

"Apparently he did it well," Rob said approv-

ingly. "No; don't get on them now. I want to ask you things. Were you at the old place, last June?"

"Not for two years. But we can talk it up later. I'll tell Sidney, then, that you will be at dinner, Thursday night." And, with a cheery nod, the guest was gone.

One of the vexatious delays which lurk on all sides in the New York streets caused Rob to be late in reaching the Stayre home, on that next Thursday night. He had barely time to discover that the whole atmosphere of the house was bookish, and shabby, and altogether delightful, to cast a hasty glance down a long line of Stayres from sixteen-year-old Sidney to an infant terrible of four, who trudged about the room with a pudgy flannel elephant clasped in his brief embrace, and to assure himself that Wade Winthrop was in the room. Then he was hurried directly to the dining-room and placed at the table between Mrs. Stayre and Sidney. Accordingly, it was not until the gay, informal meal was ended and he, with Sidney and Wade, was settled before the parlour fire, that he was able to take a good, long look at his young hostess and discover how he liked her. All in all, he did like her, like her extremely. His first impression, won from the strong, steady grasp of her hand, was strengthened by his furtive, though de-

liberate study of her face. Sidney Stayre was not absolutely pretty. Her hair was brown, her eyes were gray, and her features lacked regularity. None the less, she was alert, genial and full of a subtle suggestion of being a good and loyal comrade. For the rest, she had pretty feet, she was graceful, and her simple brown frock, relieved here and there with dashes of vivid gold, seemed as characteristic of her whole personality as did her strong and quiet hands.

"Tell me about Ronald," she said at once. "He writes to me, of course; but his letters tell so little."

The question was comprehensive. It set Rob to pondering how to reply.

"He is well, and working hard."

"Poor old boy! It was such a shame he had to give up college."

"Do you think he cared so very much?"

"Cared!" Sidney cast one swift glance at her guest. "You don't know Ronald," she added quietly.

Rob shook his head.

"No," he assented. "I'm afraid I don't."

"Whose fault is it?" she asked directly, though with a smile which took the edge from her words.

Rob laughed.

"Both, I suspect," he confessed. "I like Ronald; he's a good fellow. No doubt he would say the same of me."

"He does," Sidney interpolated quietly.

"But, nevertheless, I can't say that we either of us have manifested any wild desire for the other's society. My sister likes him. In fact, I fancy he's that sort."

"What sort?" Sidney demanded, with a brevity which suggested that she had forgotten she was the hostess of a stranger guest.

However, for some reason, Rob liked her intrepidity. He was even conscious of a sneaking wish that the day might come when Sidney Stayre would take up the cudgels for himself in that same valiant fashion.

"The sort that gets on with girls better than — "

But she interrupted him in the midst of his phrase.

"He isn't. Ask my cousin. Ronald isn't ladylike; it is only that he is so different from our boys that we have to get used to him. Once you know him, you'll see the good stuff in him. But let's talk about Janet. Maybe we'll agree better, there."

Her straightforward, off-hand fashion of going to the core of things was wholly new to Rob,

wholly pleasing. Absolutely girlish and simple, nevertheless Sidney Stayre had certain of the attributes of a healthy boy. Unconsciously he likened her to some of the comrades he had known at school.

"No," he persisted jovially; "if you don't mind I 'd rather talk about Ronald. Maybe we should agree there, if we only talked it out. You know him better than I do. Tell me about him, please."

And Sidney told. Unconsciously, however, in the telling, she told more of herself than of the subject of the talk, told of her healthy liking for the young Canadian, of her swift grasp of the stronger side of his nature; hinted, too, at the hearty support and comfort she had been to him, during all those autumn months of sorrow, of worry, and of self-denial. And Rob, sitting back and watching her brightening face, wondered to himself how he could ever have doubted her claim to prettiness. Moreover, in acknowledging the justice of her plea for Ronald, he admitted to himself that Sidney Stayre would be a friend worth having. Few girls were so directly loyal, fewer still could argue for that loyalty and leave their temper and their sense of humour still intact.

It was late, that evening, and the talk had

wandered far from Ronald Leslie, when Rob stood up to go. He had stooped for his stick; but Sidney had been before him.

"You are gaining, Wade says," she added, with a smile. "How long will you be in town?"

Rob shook his head.

"It may be hours, or ages. I am all in the hands of a cast-iron masseuse, and I am not sure how soon she'll get sick of mauling me."

Sidney laughed.

"Not too soon, I hope. It has been so good to see you and to hear about the Leslies, and we want you to come again." Then, of a sudden, her face broke into a laugh of pure mischief. "Do come," she urged; "and often. Truly, I don't always fight as I've been doing now. It's only that I like Ronald so well that I want you to know him for what he really is worth."

Rob's hand shut over her fingers, extended in farewell.

"And, from all you say, I begin to think he's worth the fighting for," he answered. "And thank you; I'll come again." And he kept his word.

Three weeks later, Rob Argyle was quite at home in the Stayre household. Urged by Mrs. Stayre, he formed the habit of dropping in

upon them, whenever the absolute boredom of the masseuse came upon his nerves. Promoted from the parlour to the library, shabby and book-crammed, he spent long evenings there, talking with Sidney, playing with the children, or gossiping with Wade of school and football, and of the Harvard days to come. Now and then Wade walked in upon him at the hospital, and sat talking for an hour; but the daylight hours of a man on the staff of an evening paper are too precious for much idling; and, for the most part, their friendship grew by artificial light and by way of the Stayre front door. And, as the weeks went by, Rob Argyle was conscious of an increasing liking for Sidney, an increasing wish to get her wholesome point of view in regard to whatever questions might arise, an increasing desire that she and Day might meet.

This desire lay strongly upon him, one dreary day in early February. It had been the morning for Day's letter, and Day's letter had not come. The mails had been irregular of late; the heavy snows had accounted for that. Nevertheless, Rob was always restless, when they failed to appear. His masseuse had been unusually energetic, that morning, too. It had seemed to Rob of late that, knowing her chances were drawing to an end, she

was sturdily resolved to cause him as much anguish as possible, during the short time which still remained to her. Twice, that morning, she had taken him in hand, the second time with such ungentle fingers that she had forced a cry and then another from her brave young charge. The degradation of his giving in to the pain was weighing hard on Rob, that noon. It was contrary to his whole creed of things, whereby a fellow should shut his teeth and take the consequences without a moan. Coupled with the exhaustion of the pain and with the final woe of missing Day's letter, it left him in a mood of deep depression. Dinner over, he resolved to call a cab and go in search of Sidney. Long before this, he had learned that Sidney's consolation held no taint of coddling.

He found her alone by the library fire, a book in her hand, but her eyes fixed on an invisible something far beyond the limits of the book-walled room. His step still dragged a little and gave warning of his approach; and Sidney sprang up alertly, the dreaminess all gone from her eyes, as she held out her hands in greeting.

Before Rob was quite aware of how it all happened, he was sitting by the fire, stretched out at his ease in a time-worn morris chair, talking about Day. As a matter of course, Sidney had heard of Day. Ronald had written of her; he himself had

mentioned her repeatedly and often. Now, however, it was different. Sidney was interested, sympathetic. Rob, his eyes now on the glowing fire, now on her bright face, gave himself up wholly to his theme, dwelling at long length on Day's daintiness, her charm, her loyal love, on their good times together, all those past ten weeks, even upon their childish tiffs and scrapes. Then he fell to ransacking his pockets for her letters. Scraps of them he read aloud, laughing, explaining, commenting upon them and upon Sidney's comments in her turn. And at last his mood changed; the depression left him, and in his blue eyes the wonted merriment replaced the hunted, worried look which Sidney had never seen in them till then.

It had been early when he reached the Stayres' home. It was still early, only half-past three, when a sudden buzz and jangle called Sidney to the telephone in the hall. She was absent for moments. When she did return, her face was white and there was an indefinable gentleness in her manner. For an instant, she bent above the fire and poked it to a blaze. Then slowly and as if with a certain reluctance, she straightened up and faced about to Rob.

"Rob," she said then; "how plucky are you?"

"Immensely," he responded promptly.

Her answering smile was wan and forced.

"I am glad. I have something —" She caught her breath, "something horrid to tell you. They 've just telephoned a message to you from the hospital."

Immediately the smile left his lips, died out from his blue eyes.

"A message!" he echoed sharply. "What?"

At sight of the change in him, Sidney shrank from the blow which she was about to deal.

"It is a telegram," she said slowly.

"A telegram? From Quebec? Who is ill? Quick!" he said imperiously.

Sidney rested her hand on his arm, pressing him back into the chair.

"It is Day," she said steadily. "She is ill."

"Very?"

She nodded sadly.

"This was the message: 'Day has pneumonia. Very ill. Come if you can.'"

For an instant there was silence, a silence broken only by the purring of the blaze among the coals. Then Rob lifted his head and drew one long, sobbing breath.

"If only it had n't been Day!" he said, and his tone was the tone of one speaking of the dead.

Sidney's voice roused him.

"Shall you go?"

"Of course."

"When?"

"Now." He glanced at the clock. "No. It 's too late."

For a moment, Sidney thought swiftly, deeply.

"You can do it. Telephone for a cab. I 'll go to Wade's room and get a few things for you to use on the way. The train goes at four. You 've just time. Wade will go down to the hospital, to-night, to get your own things together. Don't worry, Rob. We 'll see to everything here, and, after all, it may not be as bad as you think." And, with one quick, reassuring clasp of his fingers, she left him and went hurrying up the stairs.

The cab was at the door, when she came rushing back, hatted and coated, a little bag in one hand, a heavy rug across the other arm.

"Come," she said briskly. "It is time we started. I 'll drive across with you and see you off. Ready ? I think there 's everything here you need." And she sprang into the cab and drew Rob after her. "The Grand Central, quick ! " she said imperiously. Then the imperiousness left her voice and the gentler note came back again. "I am so sorry," she said simply. "Keep up your courage, if you can. I only wish I could be of any use."

And Rob, as he boarded the train with those parting words still sounding in his ears, felt better, more courageous for her final handclasp, felt that,

in the last half-hour, he had gained his first glimpse of the real Sidney Stayre. For a little while, the glimpse stayed with him and brightened him. Then, with the falling twilight, the darkness of anxiety shut down around him, and his pluck failed him, and his heart cried out for Day, and for Day alone.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

OVER the wide-spanned arch of the Springfield station, the snow was sifting softly down. The flakes were small and icy cold; and they came swiftly, steadily, directly down through the windless air. All day long and all the day before, the spirit of the New England winter had been threatening storm, frowning, gray and cold. By six o'clock that night, the first snowflakes had fallen. By eight o'clock, the roadways outside the station were covered with a thick, soft blanket, and the blanket was growing thicker with every passing minute.

Inside the station, there was warmth and light and bustle. The waiting-rooms were filled with people who came hurrying in, stamping the snow from their feet, shaking it from their shoulders and from their luggage, exchanging the greetings that are wont to fly about among commuters while the local trains are being made up in the yard above.

Outside, above the tracks between the stations, the snow-filled air was heavy with steam, and the snow beneath the feet was soft and slippery with

the dampness of the air above. Over on the northern track, the engine of a long express train lay puffing lazily to itself; and, far down the train, a tall, broad-shouldered figure was standing at attention beside the steps of one of the sleepers.

"Awful night!" he said to his attendant porter, as he pulled up his velvet collar and shrugged his shoulders together. "I fancy we'll have the car to ourselves. No, by Jove!" And he dashed forward and caught Rob Argyle by the nearer elbow. "Steady!" he cautioned him. "This snow is like pitch. Give me your luggage. And so you're going down again?"

And before Rob, tired, dazed and heartsick, could quite realize what had befallen him, he was being helped into the car and packed snugly into a section directly beneath the central light.

"Here you are, Number Eight." Then, as the lamps, shining down upon them, showed that Rob's face was gray to ghastliness, the young conductor lost his jollity. "What is it?" he asked swiftly. "Are you ill? Did you hurt yourself, when you slipped?"

Rob shook his head.

"It's my sister," he said dully.

"You mean the pretty one who came to see you off?"

"Yes. She's the only one I have."

And the answering words came with hearty, kindly sympathy, —

"I 'm sorry. I hope it is n't bad." And then, for the hour drew near for starting, he yielded to discipline and went back to his post outside the car.

His shoulders were thickly covered with white, when he came back again. While the train drew slowly out of the long, bright station, out through the snow-veiled lights of the city streets, he moved briskly to and fro, removing his overcoat and assuring himself that all was right with his car. Then he returned to Rob and, all unbidden, dropped into the vacant seat at his side.

"I 'm learning to count on you as my own property, Mr. Argyle," he said cheerily then. "It 's an odd chance that always brings you, when I 'm on the run. By the way, my name is Blanchard, Jack Blanchard. You 've taken a bad night for the trip."

"I could n't wait," Rob said briefly.

"I know. I wish it had n't been the reason. And you? You 're better?"

Rob straightened out his leg across the opposite seat.

"I was better, almost well. I twisted myself a little, getting out of the other car," he explained listlessly.

From under the shadow of his visored cap, Blanchard eyed him keenly for a moment. This was not the Rob Argyle he had seen before. Plainly his trouble was deep and lay upon him heavily. The level eyes swept Rob from head to heel, lingered a little longer on the feet which were moving with a restlessness which was not entirely due to pain. Then suddenly Jack Blanchard turned and threw one sturdy arm along the back of the seat.

"Tell me about it," he said quietly. "It won't be so hard for you, you know, after we 've talked it out."

And Rob, turning to look into the clean, kind brown eyes that faced him, was dimly conscious of a returning wave of the courage which had started up within him at Sidney's farewell words.

Together, they sat there talking until the porter came to make up the berth. Together, they moved across the aisle and went on with their talk. Now and then, as the train slackened its speed at a station, Blanchard rose and went outside. He came in again, his shoulders white, shook himself and once more dropped down at Rob's side. On such a night as that, there were no other passengers; and, as the hours and the miles rolled by, Rob had an odd sensation of being in an own private car accompanied by an own old friend. At

least, none of his own old friends could have been kindlier to him, more heedful for his comfort.

And Rob felt better for the talk. It began with Day and, even with the putting his alarm into words, it seemed to him that his alarm grew less, from the very fact of his sharing it with another. Viewed in the reflected light of the keen brown eyes before him, the message seemed of less tragic omen, Day's girlish strength seemed fitter to bear the sudden strain. At first, Rob spoke reservedly and as to a stranger; but, as the evening grew old and night came on, the sense of strangeness vanished and he talked more freely and with brightening mood.

"I beg your pardon," he said bluntly at last. "It 's not my business, I know; but how does a fellow like you happen to be —" The words stuck in his throat.

The other helped him out.

"To be running a Pullman car?" he supplemented quietly. "Why not?"

"Because —" Rob faced him directly; "because you don't seem the sort."

Blanchard laughed. Then he straightened his shoulders.

"The question is, what is the sort," he said briefly. "As for me, I was just starting in at Queen's, when the war came. Fighting is in my

race. I went out with one of the contingents. When I came back, a year ago, the father was dead, and there 's the mother to be looked out for. I took the first thing that came."

"Oh." Rob pondered swiftly. "Then you 're another."

"Beg pardon ? "

Rob glanced up to meet the inquiring eyes.

"We 're every one of us bound to get pinched, sooner or later. It all depends on whether we take it without squealing," he answered. "I was thinking of a fellow I know in Quebec. Being ill is n't the only worry."

The other man shook his head.

"Not when one comes out of it as well as you are going to do."

But Rob made dreary answer, —

"It was n't about myself I was thinking ; it was Day."

Blanchard glanced out of the window at a lighted station. Then he looked at his watch. Then he rose.

"Argyle," he said kindly ; "it 's very late. If I were you, I 'd go to bed. You 're tired ; perhaps you 'll get some sleep. Don't take this thing harder than you can help ; pneumonia is n't always deadly." He started down the car. Then, turning, he came back. "Put on your coat and come

out on the platform for a mile or two. The air will make you sleepy," he advised. "Then, if you don't sleep and get lonesome, ring me up. I 'm not allowed to go to bed till three, and there 's nobody to be disturbed, in case you feel like talking. Sure your coat is buttoned? Come." And he led the way to a sheltered corner of the vestibule.

But Rob, as he had risen to his feet, had faced him with somewhat of his old cheery smile.

"Thank you — Jack," he had answered. "You're very good to me, you know."

Nevertheless, in spite of their quarter-hour in the snowy outer air, drowsiness was not for Rob, that night. Hour after hour, he lay awake, his head resting on his heaped-up pillows and his eyes fixed on the blinding grayish mist which seemed to be enveloping the train. Most of the time, his thoughts were fixed upon Day. Now and then, however, as the night wore on, they went trailing off to other things: to the occasional dry little cough which marked the conductor's whereabouts in the car, to the long delay at a wayside station and to the fantastic shapes of the station lights behind the shifting veil of snow, to the rising wind which moaned about the car and sought to force its way through the cracks of the double windows, to the steady, sturdy determination in Jack Blanchard's eyes when he had spoken of his mother and of taking

the first thing that came. And the fellow spoke well, too, like a man of education. And he had been so kind. Rob punched his pillows into a higher mound, while he rebuked himself for the hours he had sat, pouring his own personal woes into a stranger's ears. Still, a fellow like that was never quite a stranger, any more than Sidney Stayre had been. Being a stranger was more a matter of sympathy than of introductions. But how long the night was! He had supposed it nearly over, when he had gone to bed, and still they were stopping and starting and running and stopping, as if the time would never end. He fell to counting the rails as he passed over them. It was too dark to see his watch to mark the twenty seconds; nevertheless, he knew, from old familiarity with the trick, that the train was running slowly, far more slowly than the time card allowed. And the car was very cold. Wriggling to the outer edge of the berth, he straightened up and sought for Sidney's rug which the porter had stowed away in the upper berth.

Wrapped in the rug, Rob fell asleep at last; but it was a troubled, restless sleep, haunted by dreams of Day who, lost in the storm outside, eluded all the efforts of Sidney Stayre and Jack Blanchard to find her. Nevertheless, one and then the other of them came to him and begged him not to worry. She

would be found at last, if only it would leave off snowing. A sudden jar of the train wakened him to the vague consciousness that they were stopping at a wayside station, and he opened his eyes to stare out into a mist of snowflakes falling so fast as to hide the landscape utterly. He stirred a little, yawning and rubbing the window pane in order to assure himself that the mistiness came from outside the car. Then, as he lay back again, his eye met a pair of friendly brown eyes peering in at him through the crack of the parted curtains.

"I heard you stirring," the owner of the eyes said. "If you take my advice, you will lie still and keep your appetite in check. We 're four hours late, and there is no chance for breakfast till we get to Newport."

"Four hours!"

"Yes. It is the worst storm of the year."

Rob's thoughts flew north to Day.

"What time shall we get in?"

"There 's no telling. I am sorry, sorry for you as a man can be. Keep up your pluck, though, and we 'll pull through in time. Let 's hope we 'll find her better. I would telegraph down for you for news; but they say the wires are down, up on the heights at Harlaka."

The words were direct and few; the voice was wholly kind. Then the eyes vanished, the curtains

fell together, and Rob lay back and pulled the rug over his face, that not even the pitiless gray sky should look in upon his fight with himself for steadiness and courage.

The fight lasted long ; but Rob won out. When at last he appeared from between his curtains, his face was pale, his eyes ringed with heavy shadows; but his lips were steady, his voice had its old ring. No matter if Day were ill, even to the point of death, he had no right to allow his own anxiety and sorrow to blacken for others a day which was bidding fair to be one of hardship. Day herself would have been the first one to have urged him to face the future stoutly and with a laugh on his lips. He greeted the porter cheerily ; but his eyes were a little wishful, as he looked about for Blanchard.

Quebec was still far distant when the wintry twilight closed in upon a day of storm. For Rob Argyle, it had been a day when time had ceased to be. Breakfast had merged itself in dinner ; dinner, eaten hastily at the place appointed for breakfast time, had occurred somewhere between noon and the fall of twilight. For the exact hour Rob had stopped caring. It seemed to him that time would only begin again when his journey's end should bring him news of Day. When that end would come, what that news would be, he refused to

allow himself to think. In the intervals of his long talks with Blanchard, he forced his attention to cling to the half-veiled scenes outside his window, to the snow screen which shut out all view of the distant mountain sides, to the snow-heaped villages grouped about their gray stone churches, to the trams and smelters and waste heaps of a mining town in the southern edge of the Townships, to all things outside, save a moving human figure. For hours on end, it was as if there were no human life outside their car. The village streets were clear of people, the platforms of the stations deserted. Not even at his meals did Rob catch sight of a human face, for Blanchard's quick eye had seen that his sole passenger was in no trim to battle with the storm, and he himself had come wading back to the car, laden with spoils from the steaming kitchen somewhere in the rear of the station.

"I'm an old hand at the foraging," he had explained. "Besides, there's no sense in your getting wet for nothing. You're better off inside the car."

And, as the darkness fell and Blanchard went to order the porter to turn on the lights, Rob gave over thinking of Day long enough to assure himself that, without Jack Blanchard's jovial care, his journey would have been a different thing. The

day had been one of discomfort. The train had crawled forward and come to halt by turns. The car was cold, food scarce, the outlook dreary. The train conductor lapsed into voluble French at all questions in regard to the hour of their arrival. There was nothing to do but wait — and worry. And Blanchard had so far helped the one thing as wellnigh to prevent the other. Bundled in blankets to the chin, the two young fellows had nestled side by side, with Sidney's rug across their knees, while Blanchard had spun interminable yarns of life on veldt and kopje, had made merry over the strange people who had slept the night in that selfsame car. And, all the time, even while his mirth infected Rob and chased the shadow from his eyes, Blanchard's own keen brown eyes, meeting Rob's blue ones, told their wordless story of sympathy and of friendly liking. And so the day and the miles dragged on.

Under conditions such as this, social rank counts for nothing. Long before nightfall, they were Rob and Jack to each other; long before nightfall, Rob had forgotten that he was a rich man's son, fallen by chance into the care of an efficient Pullman conductor. Instead, he merely had a vague consciousness that Blanchard was an all-round good fellow and of a speech and manner equal to his own; that never once, in all those tedious hours,

had he neglected, nor yet obtruded, a little watchful care for his weaker comrade. Still more vaguely was he conscious that a comradeship such as theirs had been, that day, was bound to bear its fruit at some time in the future. Under some conditions, Rob could have enjoyed the day, enjoyed even its sheer discomforts. To a hearty boy with a mind at rest, they would have held their own charming spice of danger. But now, however far diverted, his mind kept swinging back to the one fixed point. That point, of course, was Day.

It was a certain relief when the porter turned on the lights. The drawn curtains of the car shut out all measure of the slowness of their progress. The wind had fallen with the falling dark; the drifts were fewer now, their passage steadier. And so they plodded on and on, while twilight grew to evening, and evening turned into night. And at last, just as the clocks in the distant city were chiming the hour of twelve, the train rumbled through the last of the Harlaka snowsheds and went sliding away down the long grade that leads to Levis.

Cramped and stiff with the cold and the long sitting still, Rob was glad to rest his hand on Blanchard's shoulder, as he stepped down from the car. His eyes, meanwhile sought through and through the little crowd upon the platform. Then

he pulled his hat over his eyes, while his other hand shut on Blanchard's arm. In all that little waiting crowd, there was no familiar face.

"Steady, Rob!" Blanchard's voice was quiet. "Likely there 's been no ferry across, to-night. Take my arm. It 's slippery as death. The porter will see to your traps. Come along." And he led the way to the ferry-house, and came on board the little boat, already steaming and straining at her moorings in the wash of the ebbing tide.

Once out upon the river, they found themselves in a sea of floating, grinding cakes of ice which mounted on each other's shoulders, jostled each other with angry crashings, came eddying and swirling down against the ferry's sides, sending long, thudding shivers throughout her sturdy little frame. In such a tide as that and in such a storm, no boats had crossed since noon. Now, freightless but crowded from stem to stern, the captain was putting out, to try his chances with the mighty river, swollen with storm and thick with the ice which rushed seaward with the ebbing tide. The snow, meanwhile, had nearly ceased to fall; and, through its scattered flakes, the lights from Citadel and terrace shone calmly down, throwing their placid beams across the raging, hissing river.

Blanchard's keen eyes were clouded, as he rejoined Rob inside the stuffy cabin. Just once

before he had crossed the river on such a night. He knew how to read the captain's face, knew, too, the meaning of the signals flashed from the ferry-house at Levis to the distant shore. Inside the cabin, stuffy as it was, there was shelter from the gale. Nevertheless, —

"Roll yourself up in your rug and come outside," he bade Rob briefly. "A night like this, the ice is worth the watching."

And Rob found it so. Blanchard had led the way to a sheltered corner of the deck where, leaning on the rail, Rob lost himself, lost even the consciousness of Day, in watching the fierce strife of winter, watching the eddying, whirling cakes of ice, borne down by the tide, thrown back by the wind which came sweeping up the river; watching them roll and toss and grind together, now falling apart again, then clinging in an ever-widening sheet about the ferry's bow and sides. No thought of danger came to him; he was exulting in his every nerve and fibre in this mad fury of the winter storm. And beside him, Blanchard's answers to his words grew vague and brief, while he watched with practised eye the increasing coat of ice about their keel, the increasing size of the blocks of ice which came crashing down against them, then looked up at the opposite shore to measure by the dimming lights the speed of their course, as steadily, surely, swiftly, in spite

of steam and steering gear, the plucky little ferry lost her headway and was borne farther and farther down the stream.

At length Rob roused himself and framed an objection.

"It's beastly cold out here. I've seen enough. What if we go inside?"

Blanchard hesited, demurred. Then, as one huge black block and another came down upon them, he turned and looked Rob straight between the eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said. "We 'd best stay here."

"But why? I'm chilled through and through."

"I know." And in that moment it flashed through Rob's mind that his companion's uniform was no mate for his own fur-lined coat. "It is cold. Still, I think it is safer here outside."

Rob faced him in surprise.

"You mean?"

"I mean," and Blanchard's steady touch was on his arm; "I mean, in case things happen." Then he forced the gravity from his tone and laughed cheerily. "They probably won't happen. In any case, I swim like a fish, and I'll hang on to you and see you safely over."

But, even as he spoke, both he and Rob were well aware that swimming in such an ice-locked tide was something beyond the reach of human power.

For one moment and for one moment only, Rob

felt something come up in his throat and stop his breath. Then he steadied himself, straightened his shoulders and laughed out in his old cheery fashion.

"We'll fight it out together to the end, Jack," he answered. Then silently, but with Blanchard's hand still on Rob's arm, the two young fellows stood there waiting, gazing out over the ink-black, tossing river.

Slowly the lights of the city were dimming in the distance; slowly the ice-sheets grew on bow and stern. Down across the chilly air the voice of the captain came strident, his orders mingled with the sound of jangling bells. The wheels of the little boat still beat the water; but impotently now, for progress meant the dragging with her of many tons of ice. And, if the ice held firm, all might be well. But if it once began to crumble? Blanchard's hand tightened upon Rob's arm. And not even a sound man could swim ashore in such a tide, still less a fellow crippled by a football strain. And the lights of the Citadel were growing fainter.

And then, of a sudden, a shrill little cheer from the pilot house was answered by a distant whistle. On the King's Wharf lights were stirring; out from the King's Wharf lights were starting, were being swept down the stream towards them, — swept fast and steadily. Through the chill, still air, above the

crashing of ice-cakes, there came again the whistle, nearer now, and the throbbing of a mighty engine. And the lights came ever nearer until, outlined against the inky sky, a great black bulk showed itself, dimly at first and then with every mast and funnel standing out distinct. And then, with a tearing, rending noise, the huge ice-breaker came plunging into the floe which held the ferry motionless and impotent, plunged into it, cut across it, circled through it in two narrowing arcs ; and then, with a whistle of supreme content, it turned southward and, forging slowly, steadily ahead, cut open a wide pathway up the river back to the distant ferry-house once more.

But Jack Blanchard's grasp of Rob's arm never relaxed its steady, reassuring pressure until the ferry came to her moorings, and Ronald Leslie, huge, ruddy and smiling at his own good news, came leaping over the rail before the gang-plank had been lowered.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"DO you mean walk, or ride?"

"I meant to walk."

"To the toll-gate?"

"Why not? If need be, you can bring me home in a cab."

Janet departed without a word. When she came back, hat and coat in hand, she spoke.

"Rob," she said; "it's too jolly."

And Rob made swift answer,—

"No; just jolly enough."

Down in his secret heart, though, Rob felt assured that nothing was jolly enough to account for his mood, that first morning in March. Life's smile was broadened to a grin of sheer hilarity. Day, dressed and looking her old blithe self, had come to breakfast, that morning, for the first time. In honour of the great event, Mrs. Leslie had prepared an extra feast, and Ronald had delayed for half an hour his start down town, in order to share in the general rejoicing. There had been a box of violets from Sir George Porteous and, just as they were leaving the table, the postman had

brought in the New York letters. There had been three of them, one for Ronald from Sidney, and two for Rob. The more bulky one he had laid aside to feast on at his leisure, for it was from Wade Winthrop, and the past three weeks had taught Rob that Wade Winthrop's letters were worthy to be read with care and more than once. The other was from Rob's New York doctor, short and crispy. Rob's hurried going from New York had left but one course open: the placing the case in the hands of a doctor in Quebec, who should keep in constant communication with the specialist at home. That morning's letter, called forth by the latest bulletin, brought news of the dismissal of the new masseuse, coupled with elaborate instructions for a series of daily walks, to begin at once and to increase as time went on. The letter closed with a succinct phrase: "I have done all I can. Now it is for you to finish up your perfect cure."

And, with that phrase still ringing in his head, Rob had risen and, coffee cup in hand, in an incoherent speech, he had proposed the health of Day, of the New York specialist and of the Exeter football team. That drunk and the chairs pushed back from the table, Rob had gone in search of his hat, then of Janet.

It had been nearly three o'clock in the morning when the cab, with Ronald and Rob inside, had

driven from the ferry-house up Mountain Hill and into Saint Louis Street. Nevertheless, even at that unseemly hour, Janet's nose had been pressed against the window. A moment later, Janet's right hand had thrown open the door, her left had seized on Rob's cold wrist and dragged him into the warm, bright hall.

"She 's really and truthfully better, and I 'm so glad you 've come! Are you dead, you poor thing? She 's asleep; but she knew you were on the way," Janet whispered tempestuously. "Come to the library fire. I 'll take your coat and things." And Rob, dazed by the light and warmth and welcome, by the sharp reaction from his fears, yielded and let her fuss over him and coddle him at will.

Nevertheless, in spite of the allaying of his active fears, his heart sank again when he learned how ill Day had been, how very ill she was then. There had been a sudden chill, followed by a total neglect of certain symptoms. Twenty-four hours later, Mrs. Argyle had come back from Montreal to find Day curled up on her bed, her eyes glittering with fever, her breath coming short, her cough incessant. The girl had made light of her cough, had maintained a sturdy silence regarding the dull pain that had settled on her whole body. Mrs. Argyle had waited until the next morning. Then she had sent

for a doctor, and, later in the morning, she had telegraphed for her husband and Rob. Twenty-four hours later, the more alarming symptoms were in check; two weeks later, the disease and the consequent weakness were still dragging out their wonted course. Day's tardy yielding to the disease had retarded by just so much her yielding to its cure. By the end of the second week, she was still in her own room.

Thither Rob had followed her as soon as he was allowed to do so, and for as long. During the first days after his return, however, he was permitted in the room only for occasional five-minute calls. The calls, elaborately made on the points of his toes and with his heart in his throat, had sent him away from the room again in a mood of deepest depression. This was no Day he had ever known, this wan, white-faced thing with the weak voice and the lustreless eyes. He stood and stared down at her dumbly, then mumbled a word or two and fled from the room before the end of his allotted five minutes. Later, he walked his room for hours on end, or forced himself to dreary games of solitaire wherein his question *yes* or *no* was answered by the falling of the cards. And the questions always framed themselves on Day's recovery, and the answer was too often *no*. Still, the cards could never tell the truth; and, at least, they were better

than trying to read. Then fate dealt him six *noes* in succession, and he rose to pace the floor again until it should be time for his next call.

In hours like this, Janet Leslie was his great source of consolation. Full of her old cordial friendliness, resolved at any cost to make amends for the black shadow she had thrown upon their past good times, the girl had adopted Rob Argyle as her own especial care. Mrs. Argyle was all absorbed in her attendance on the nurse and Day, Mrs. Leslie in her attendance upon Mrs. Argyle. Janet struck out upon a new line of usefulness and made up her resolute young mind that Rob needed attention as much as any of the rest. She gave it to him unreservedly. Now she came sweeping in upon him, abolished his cards and substituted a Latin exercise which she claimed she could not ferret out alone. Then she moved softly across the twilight-darkened room, to fall in step beside him and talk to him with a steady persistency which broke down his dreary mood. Again, when the tense quiet of the afternoon rest hour lay on the house, she coaxed him out for a turn on the terrace, or a ride around the loop in the flat-wheeled car that clanked a monotonous accompaniment to all their random talk. And Rob came in, refreshed and brightened, from all these little jaunts.

Moreover, he carried the brightening with him, later, when he went in to visit Day.

Next to Janet, to his surprise, in these days of dreary waiting, he turned to Ronald. His turning was not wholly due to Ronald's greeting, at the end of that tragic night of ice and storm. In his mood, that night, Rob Argyle would have sworn undying regard for anyone who brought good news of Day. Ronald's face had been enough to tell that, for Ronald himself, the news brought no impersonal gladness. Nevertheless, in the days which followed his return, Rob was studying Ronald as never before, studying him in the light of his long talks with Wade Winthrop and with Sidney Stayre. Up to that time, although he had had some vague realization that Ronald had been disappointed by the sudden reversing of all his plans, Rob had had no real notion of how bitter that disappointment was. To his mind, college meant little for a fellow who did not care to go in for athletics. If the grind were all, or if society, he could do those of an evening, after he had clambered down from his office stool. Lacking, too, all knowledge of the Leslies in their more prosperous days, he had had scanty comprehension of how great in comparison was their present shabbiness, their present need for scrimping. Until his last long

talk with Wade, he had supposed it was from careless choice, not stern necessity, that Ronald wore a last-year tie and forewent a hemstitched border to his handkerchiefs. He had made summary comment, one night, on Ronald's tastelessness in the minor articles of dress. Even now, he laughed to himself as he recalled Sidney's swift denunciations of his comment. Janet, in the snow-bound library, had been scarcely more vehement, more sweeping. Nevertheless, now that he was back in Quebec and face to face with the tall young Canadian, Rob could realize to the full how much such petty denials could have the power to exasperate him. To Rob Argyle, denied in nothing save a concrete knowledge of the value of money, it seemed that it would be far easier to give up a year in Europe than to wear clothing of a past year's cut. To wear it at all took some backbone. To wear it and, still hating it, to treat it with seeming unconsciousness, in Rob's eyes, amounted to the heroic. And, if it were so in the matter of clothes, how about some other things?

In his long, idle days of waiting, Rob pondered much upon the question. Strange to say, he had never discussed with Day this phase of Ronald's life. Rob had avoided the subject from the inherent masculine hatred of petty gossip, Day from a sense that Ronald's confidence had closed her

lips, when otherwise she might have spoken. Now at last, however, there seemed to have come home to Rob the consciousness of just what Ronald Leslie's present life might be meaning to him.

"We're all alike," he remarked to himself, one night. "None of us are quite satisfied with what we get out of the grab bag. I hanker for the gridiron, Ronald hankers for the fleshpots. Even Blanchard has his hankerings. Good old Jack! I wonder what's become of him."

The wonder was answered, next day, when Rob was summoned to the telephone. Blanchard, back from his run to the south, had called him up to ask for Day first, then for Rob himself. And Rob had said to his father, as he had left the telephone,—

"Funny thing how you happen on a man and, all at once, feel you're going to know him always! You'll never understand how good that fellow was to me, nor what a gentleman he really is."

Nevertheless, in his more active gratitude to Blanchard, Rob had some shreds left over to give to Ronald Leslie. Even more than Janet, Ronald shared his anxiety for Day, his loneliness without her. Night after night, long after Janet was in bed, the two young fellows sat before the library fire, while Ronald told over to Rob all of Day's

doings during the weeks he had been away, told him, too, of the bright, blithe comradeship of the early fall when, sick and sore of heart, tired of his unwonted confinement in the office, Day's gayety had helped to hold him steady on his feet. And Rob, in his turn, talked of New York, of Wade and of Sidney, and of their liking for Ronald. And at last, one night, Rob turned his steady, true blue eyes from the fire and fixed them upon Ronald's face.

"Old man," he said; "I 'm not sure I 've always been quite fair to you. Maybe you were n't always fair to me. We 're of two races, you know, two sorts. Still — let 's shake hands on it, and start again."

That had been a week before. And now, with Janet at his side, Rob was walking out the Grande Allée, past the cabstand just outside the Louis Gate, past the Parliament Buildings and on to the crest of the little ridge where Montcalm drew up his soldiers, on that far-off, fateful September day.

Janet caught her breath a little, as she went down the gentle slope beyond.

"It 's funny," she said; "but I never come out here, without thinking I see it all. When I was a little bit of a girl, before I knew they fought on foot, I used to think I could hear their horses galloping. But just think, Rob Argyle! Right here

in the city, where we go to walk and where our friends all live, those two great nations had their last pitched battle. Does n't it make you shiver?"

Rob turned up the collar of his coat.

"Not half so much as this beastly wind does," he returned prosaically.

Janet frowned. Her father had been an historian spoiled in the making. The girl's earliest bedtime stories had concerned themselves with that battle-ground.

"How tiresome you are!" she said, with a little laugh. "I suppose it is because I was born here that I care for it. I never pass that field," her finger pointed towards the left; "without thinking that Wolfe was shot there in his brand-new uniform, nor come inside the Louis Gate without remembering the French woman standing there who cried out that her general was killed. It 's no use. You strangers never feel it." She began to laugh again. "Did Day write you about the afternoon we took Sir George Porteous out to the Cove?"

Rob shook his head. In spite of the biting wind and of his endeavours to stand upright on the slippery pavements, his whole attention had been concentrated upon Janet, upon her eager face and upon her enthusiasm of the moment before.

"She did n't? It was worth a letter. You see, I know the ground, every inch of it, and love it,"

she explained. "My father nearly wrote a book about it; and he used to bring me here and talk to me, until I almost felt as if it were my very own, like something that had happened to me. Ronald and I brought Day out here, just before you came, last fall. It's a splendid walk, out across the Plains, and through the woods and over some fences, till you come to the path. Day loved it, and she thought it would be fun to take Sir George. We went out on snowshoes, and he had a fearful time, lost his shoes off, every other step. And, when we got him there and expected him to be thrilled, what do you think he said?"

Again Rob shook his head. He was still watching the eager face, still held by the eager flow of words.

"He said," Janet giggled, as she took on Sir George's level voice; "'Came up here, by George? Why didn't the poor chap wait and build some steps?'"

"Look here, Janet," Rob said suddenly, as they turned away from the simple shaft that marks Wolfe's victorious death; "why don't you write about it all? I don't mean now, of course; but sometime."

Janet's colour came, and went. Then she lowered her eyes, while, half unconsciously, she laid her hand on Rob's arm to steady him over the

uneven path which leads back to the Grande Allée.

"I used to think I would," she said slowly. "But now I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because — it went, with all the rest of it."

Her cadence was a falling one. In it, Rob read the presence of a secret he had never guessed.

"What went?" he asked.

"Shall we take the car? No? You are sure you can walk back? I mean my little plan," she answered, with her eyes still on the ground.

"What plan?" he asked again.

"Did n't you know? I thought Sidney might have told you. She is going to college; just the last day or two we were together, she began to talk to me about it, to tease my mother to say I might go, too. Mother would n't say. I suppose now that she could n't; but, the night after I came home, the very night before —"

"Yes, I know," Rob assented gently, for the little quaver in Janet's resolute young voice struck sadly on his ears.

Janet swallowed hard, for a moment.

"That very last night," she went on bravely, then; "I had a talk with my father. He was so dear. He always was, but most so then. He told me he was n't sure he could arrange it; but that he wished he could. And then he told me —"

This time, although the quaver came again, Rob made no effort to speak. His eyes were dark, dark blue, as he looked out across the distant southern mountains. Janet broke the silence, suddenly, resolutely.

"He told me it had always been his dream to have one of his children finish up his work and write the book. He had supposed it would be Ronald, for boys are usually the ones who do such things; but Ronald was all for science and that sort of thing. And now, if I felt I could do it, would love to do it, he would give me all the training I could get, to fit me for it. All the next night and day, I dreamed about it, dreamed and thought. I was just sitting down to write to Sidney, when — when Ronald came and told us."

Rob's left hand had been buried in the fur-lined pocket of his coat. He took it out and, regardless of who saw him, gave Janet's hand a hearty squeeze.

"You 'll do it yet," he said.

She shook her head.

"I can't."

Rob laughed at her tone.

"I never heard you say that till now, Janet," he admonished her, with a swift return to his wonted buoyancy. "A fellow can do anything he tries, if he grits his teeth and goes to work."

"A fellow can't make money, where there is n't any," she answered him.

"I 'm not so sure of that. Besides, it does n't take much," Rob reassured her optimistically.

"Not much, if you have a lot," she responded quaintly; "but a great deal, when you haven't any. Besides, your colleges cost more than ours."

"Then go to yours," Rob advised her promptly.

But she shook her head.

"You want to go with Sidney, I suppose. You know Day is going, too. She 'll go to Smith."

"That is Sidney's College," Janet assented listlessly. "It's where I wanted, meant to go."

"But, if McGill is cheaper?"

She roused herself and spoke with spirit.

"I don't want McGill. My father did n't, either. If I am to do his work, I must learn to see all sides, not sit down and look at it from a hummock on the Cove Fields. If I go to McGill, I shall see our side and nothing else. I love my Canada; it 's the best country in the world. Still, I won't do my father's work, unless I can do it in the very best way, and the only way to do that is to learn to look at it from a little farther off."

In the enthusiasm of the moment, Janet's girlishness had fallen from her. She spoke with the purpose, with the steady fire of a grown-up woman. Rob, looking down upon her as she tramped for-

ward at his side, was conscious, in that moment, of a new-born admiration, less for what Janet was than for what she might be in the future years. At last he spoke, and his voice was full of hearty approbation.

"I think you'll make it in the end, Janet. Something will come up to help you put it through."

"But I don't want to be helped," she made undaunted answer.

Laughing a little, Rob held up his stick before her.

"Sometimes a little help is useful," he told her gayly. "At least, it steadies us until we can get back on our feet again." Then the laughter left his eyes, and he looked down at her with the kindly smile of an older brother. "Go on, Janet," he bade her gravely. "You'll win out in the end, if you'll only stick to your plan." And, years afterward, they laughed together over his prophecy and its fulfilment.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THREE weeks later, as Ronald came up from the office for the Saturday half-holiday, an unwonted mood of buoyancy lay upon him, making even the rivulets in the streets, sloppy with the first spring thaw, matters of small account. For two or three weeks, the office had been coming upon Ronald's nerves: the early punctuality of his morning start down town, the long, dull day which began and ended under the electric lights, the growing responsibility of business which had been thrown upon him after his last talk with his chief, the care and anxiety, growing even faster, as to whether the contents of the coal-bin would outlast an abnormally severe winter: all these had worn upon him and strained his nerves to their utmost tension. Under the wear and tear of small worries which concerned themselves with the length of life of his shoes and gloves, with the least possible amount of draft which could be given to the furnace, his step was losing its alertness, his rich colour was fading a little, his shoulders were less erect. By steady self-control, he

kept his temper level; but the winter, long and pitiless, had told upon his sense of humour. He talked less, and he left to Rob and Janet the sparring which enlivened the hours at table. Now and then, as the clock struck two, and then three, and then four, he rolled over on his pillow and wondered what would be the end of it all. And Mr. Argyle was talking of returning home at Easter. There would be three long months, before the summer tide of boarders would set in, even supposing that his mother would feel herself able to cope with the transient tourist tribe.

That noon, however, with a sudden and unaccountable rush, all depression had fled from Ronald's mood. With his head held high, his tread ringing out upon the pavement, he went tramping up the hill towards home. It was something that his tread could ring out on any pavement, so long had the walks been muffled in their winter coats. The streets which led to Lower Town were crossed and crossed again by threads of running water; and the sky above, a clear Italian blue, held in its tints the promise of an early spring. Ronald's tread grew even more alert, as he ran up the steps at home and fitted his latch-key in the T-shaped hole. It was a glorious day. He would lure Rob out for the longest possible walk.

To his surprise, he found Sir George Porteous enthroned before the library fire. Rob, in a chair at the opposite end of the rug, was making heroic efforts to keep the conversation going; but it was plain to Ronald's eye that Sir George was low in his mind, and that Rob's benevolent efforts were fast coming to an end. Rob Argyle was broad-minded and open to conviction. He had been quite ready to take Jack Blanchard, Pullman hireling though he was, upon familiar, friendly terms. Not all the broad-mindedness in the world, however, could make Rob understand the new position of Sir George Porteous inside the Leslie home.

"I never yearned to own a monkey, myself," he confided to Day, one night. "Still, if you must keep one, I 'm glad he never fails to be amusing."

Nevertheless, if only out of deference to his mother's wish, Rob treated Sir George with a scrupulous courtesy whose only lapses were marked by occasional hasty retreats from the room.

"I 've a beastly cough, you know," Rob had said, by way of explanation of one such exit. "It seems to hang on me, too. I begin to think I sha'n't get rid of it, until I 'm back in New York."

As Ronald's step sounded in the hall, Sir George sat up in his chair and betook himself to his eye-glass.

"Oh, it 's you; is it? I came to see you. How do you do?" he explained, when Ronald appeared upon the library threshold.

"Glad to see you." Ronald nodded affably, for his buoyant mood was still upon him. "Where have you been keeping yourself, this last week?"

"I have been thinking," Sir George announced sombrely.

And Rob, choking, fled from the room.

It was merciful, perhaps, that he did flee, for Ronald, disconcerted by his hurried exit, fitted his reply to the accent of Sir George, rather than to his words.

"I 'm sorry," he said politely.

And then silence fell.

Sir George broke the silence, but only after a long interval.

"I 'm in a regular brute of a mess," he said.

Swiftly Ronald's mind journeyed to and fro from policemen to usurers. Sir George scarcely seemed a roistering blade, neither was he likely to be in financial difficulties. Ronald's mind leaped forward and took its stand upon a third alternative. Sir George must be in love.

"I am sorry," he repeated. "Can I be of any use?"

"I really don't know," Sir George responded blankly. "My uncle is dead."

The matter-of-course announcement, coupled with the fact of his twice having used the same phrase of sympathy, hampered Ronald's tongue.

"How very sad!" he said at length.

Sir George leaned back in his chair.

"You find it so?" he queried dispassionately.

"Of course. Don't you?"

"Oh, no. Why should I? He was so old, you know, and had lost his mind and the use of his legs," Sir George made tranquil explanation. "It was n't sudden in the least."

"How did you hear?" Ronald inquired politely, although somewhat at a loss how to frame his condolences.

"They cabled. You see, I inherit," Sir George explained, with utter nonchalance.

"Inherit?"

"Yes, the title, and the estates, and all that. I 'll have to be going home. There 's the mess."

Ronald's face cleared a little, as he grasped what appeared to be the only clue to Sir George's depression.

"And you hate to say good-by to us, Sir George?"

"Oh, no; I don't mind about that," Sir George gave disconcerting answer.

"But you feel badly about your uncle?"

"Oh, no; it 's not that, either. I never saw him but once. He was a queer old duck, and he and

my father had a row," Sir George made still more disconcerting answer.

"Then what do you mind?" Ronald asked bluntly. "I don't see that you have much cause to complain."

His head immovable against the back of his chair, Sir George allowed his eyes to follow the tall figure of his companion who had risen impatiently and gone to pacing the rug. His jaw, meanwhile, sagged slightly, and his expression was one of tranquil complacency.

"I 'm feeling fussed," he said at length. "It really is a brute of a mess."

"What is?" Ronald demanded, while he halted midway of the rug and rested his elbow beside the clock on the mantel.

"It all," Sir George explained. "My going home, and the things I 'll do, when I get there."

Ronald curbed his impatience. Never had Sir George appeared more futile; never, though, had he been more plainly worried. Suddenly he looked up with a smile.

"That 's what I want of you, you know," he added.

Ronald stared.

"What is?"

"To do the things."

"What things?"

"The things to be done at home."

This time, Ronald permitted himself to laugh.

"But I 'm not inheriting, Sir George."

The next moment his conscience smote him, for Sir George's glance was appealing, his voice full of pathos.

"No," he assented. "I only wish you did, you know. You 'd do it better than I can."

Ronald dropped down again into his chair.

"Don't worry, Sir George," he said kindly. "Of course, I know at first there 'll be a lot of care and responsibility. But it will get itself to running easily enough in time."

Sir George's face cleared at Ronald's change of tone.

"That 's what I said to myself," he said eagerly. "I sat and thought, and thought. All at once, it came like a flash, and I said, 'Leslie 's the very fellow.'"

"Thanks," Ronald said. "For what?"

"To get things running. You see," Sir George fell to checking the items on his fingers; "there 's the town house, and the country place, and the tenants' dinner, and the hunt ball, and the —" He paused and sought the corners of his mind. "Oh, yes, I know. There 's the mourning liveries and that. That 's why I want you," he added helplessly. "I don't know about such things."

"Nor I," Ronald asserted with energy.

"Oh, no; but you can learn."

"And so will you," Ronald suggested.

But Sir George shook his head.

"I can't. I can't learn things," he said, and there came a sadness in his tone. "I know it, know it as well as you do. I was plucked at college, and they tried to buy me into the army; but I could n't make that, either. I 'd like to be clever like you, you know; but I fancy I never could. And now look at me!" And Ronald, looking, was astounded at the sudden determination in Sir George's face. "Here I am, not clever in the least, and I 've just come into one of the largest estates in England. And, by George!" Sir George added, in a desperate outburst; "what am I going to do with it, now I 've got it?"

"Manage it," Ronald said, with an optimism which he was far from feeling.

Sir George spoke again. This time his tone betokened a steady determination.

"With you," he said.

Ronald looked, as he felt, bewildered.

"What have I to do with it?" he asked.

"Come home with me, as my secretary."

"I can't."

"Why not?" The determination was still there.

"Impossible. I 'm tied up here with mother and Janet."

Sir George's jaw shut, as he rose to his feet and stood looking down at the young Canadian.

"There 's the salary, too, you know," he said, and he named the sum.

"Sir George, I never could take that."

"But it 's what it 's worth to me. Listen!" He raised his hand, white and shapely and marked with a single ring, a crest in its plain setting. "I can't do it alone, you know. I have no head for business. I can do the social things, drink tea and dance. Perhaps, with you to coach me, I could even do the politics. But the business would be in no end of a mess. I must have some fellow to do it for me, and there 's no fellow else I want, you know."

"But if I can't?" Ronald said slowly.

Sir George's accent lost its determination and took on a new tone, one of pleading.

"I don't like many fellows," he explained, simply as a child might have done. "I took to you that first night at dinner, and I 've liked you ever since. You never chaff, you know, and —" the words came with a dropping cadence; "and any fellow gets a bit tired of being chaffed."

And even Ronald's direct gaze fell before the steady, trusting eyes.

"Sir George," he said at length; "I 'm sorry. I wish I could go."

"You'd like it, then?" Sir George made eager question.

Ronald reflected swiftly, swiftly balanced all the pros and cons.

"Yes," he answered honestly then. "Yes, I'd like it. Still, it is quite impossible."

"Really, I don't see why."

Ronald looked up.

"I'm not for myself alone," he answered. "There's Janet and my mother."

Standing bolt upright in the middle of the room, Sir George compressed his lips until the wrinkles were graven deeply in his cheeks. Then of a sudden he faced about and started for the door.

"I say," he exclaimed alertly; "I say, let's ask them now." And, before Ronald could stop him, he had crossed the hall and knocked on the dining-room door.

Late that night and for two nights after, the Leslie library became the scene of such a detailed argument as its walls had never known till then. After her first consternation at the thought of losing her oldest-born child out of the home, Mrs. Leslie had thrown herself, heart and soul, upon the side of Sir George Porteous. The offered salary, she confessed to herself, was abnormally large. Nevertheless, mother-like, she looked beyond that, far beyond. To one like Ronald, steady, earnest,

there would be by far more education in the new life offered him than in years of McGill and graduate schools. Moreover, she had been by no means blind to the way even Ronald's vigorous young strength was faltering before the rigid confinement of his office life. Sir George's offer would bring him freedom from the deadly routine which led nowhere; while she had assured herself, both by her own observations and by the careful inquiries of Mr. Argyle, that Sir George's influence, while not exactly stimulating, would yet be upon the side of cleanly, man-like living. She urged the new position upon Ronald with all the fervour of the same iron will which, months before, had led her, even in the first shadow of her grief, to open her home to the Argyles.

To her will, however, Ronald opposed one just as firm. He was in no way deceived by her statements that she would be happier with him in England; it was no part of his plan to go to live in the comparative luxury of his offered surroundings, and leave his mother and Janet to tug on alone. Had he been wholly free, he would have leaped at the chance to go, would have grasped it with both hands. Like his mother, he had been quick to see its opportunities for his growth. Nevertheless, he had also seen the blue-white ring come into sight about his mother's lips, when Sir George, with un-

wonted directness, had stated to her his need of Ronald's services. He stoutly refused to listen to one single word in favour of his going.

For two whole evenings and a fraction of the third, the tide of argument ebbed and flowed. At last, however, late upon the third evening, Janet flung herself headlong into the discussion.

"Ronald?"

Ronald had been pacing, pacing the floor. Now he turned sharply to face his sister, as she sat curled up in a deep chair, her feet tucked under her and her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

"Well?"

"If mother were dead and I were in college, what should you do?"

"Janet!" he rebuked her sharply.

"Well, I know. But we are n't, and my supposing it does n't make us so; does it, mummy? But what should you do?"

Ronald shut his lips until his face was lined with two deep creases, not unlike those of Sir George.

"Go," he said shortly.

Janet unclasped her hands, leaned her elbows on the chair-arm and put her chin on her palms. For an instant, she watched him, while she beat a tattoo on either cheek. Then, —

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I 'd have nothing to keep me here."

Far back in Janet's eyes there came a mocking gleam.

"Thanks, dear boy! But, even then, you just said you didn't want to go, in any case."

Fairly cornered, Ronald opened his mouth to speak, then shut it, speechless. Again Janet watched him. Then she slid out of her chair, crossed the rug and slipped her hand in his.

"Brother," she said slowly; "it will half kill me to have you go; and yet I want to have you do it. It is the best thing for you, the best thing and the biggest. If you like it over there, some day you can send for mummy and me, and we'll all live there together. We are English, you know, just as English as Sir George is. It may be like a going home for you. You've always said you liked Sir George, in spite of his queerness. He's been good to you, to us all. Now, for a while, you can be good to him. And, besides, if you truthfully don't like it, you can always take the first steamer that sails for home. Only," her voice broke a little; "only send us word in time, so we can get the fattest calf that ever lived."

"But you and mother," Ronald urged.

Janet's chin rose in the air.

"I will look out for mother," she said conclusively. And she kept her word.

Nevertheless, the tide of argument rose again,

and again it ebbed. However, each ebbing and flowing now was only washing them nearer to one fixed point, and that point was Ronald's going.

Janet accompanied her brother, the next evening, when he set out to the Château, to acquaint Sir George with his decision. The decision had been wrung from him with infinite toil, and Janet had no mind to have that toil set at naught by any possible change in Ronald's intention. Back in the depths of her girlish brain, she had settled the point for herself once and for all. Ronald must go. It was the chance of a lifetime, not only in itself, but for the sake of other chances which might come in its train. Janet already looked upon Ronald as the coming premier of England. Mrs. Leslie took the case more simply. She regarded Ronald as facing a future which held in its grasp more opportunity than anything she had it in her power to offer. Mother-like, she was willing to endure his absence for the sake of what that absence might do for him. Like Janet, she was wholly resolved upon his going. Like Janet, she feared his promise would be revoked in the end, and she had hailed gladly Janet's suggestion of acting as his escort.

They found Sir George in the main drawing-room, lounging on the circular divan which rings the central pillar. His eyes were fixed upon the

ceiling; but his mouth, slightly ajar, stirred now and then, as if speaking words relating to the obvious anxiety which furrowed the brow above. Clothed from head to foot in decorous and sombre black, Sir George looked a very youthful and a futile heir to all the responsibility which awaited him; and Janet, as she studied him, did not wonder that, in view of what was now before him, he was putting off from day to day the engaging of his passage home.

Absorbed in his silent communings, Sir George paid no heed to their coming; and, quite unseen, they paused close at his side. Then,—

"Sir George," said Janet.

Sir George started abruptly.

"Eh? Oh, I say, how do you do? I was thinking about you. Sit down." And, as they obeyed his hospitable bidding, Sir George apparently returned to his former meditation, for no further word fell from his moving lips.

Once, twice, Ronald started to speak. But he checked the impulse, checked it in sheer dread of all to which his speech was sure to bind him. Then he rose to his feet, straightened his shoulders, and resolutely, courageously looked the future in the eyes.

"Sir George," he said briefly; "I came, to-night, to tell you that I have made my decision. I accept

your offer, and I am ready to sail when you see fit."

Slowly the vacant gaze of Sir George gathered itself to a focus upon Ronald Leslie's strong young face, gathered to a focus, then lighted with sudden, earnest pleasure. Then he sank back in his seat again, as if, for him, anxiety were at an end.

"How rummy!" said Sir George Porteous.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"SHABBY! Shabby! Shabby!" Janet said, in an abrupt wave of disgust.

An elderly glove in one hand, a threaded needle in the other, Janet was settled in Mrs. Argyle's sitting-room. Mrs. Argyle glanced up, at the sudden desperation in the girl's tone.

"What is it, Janet?" she asked kindly.

Janet forced herself to laugh; but the laugh was not quite steady.

"Nothing; only my gloves are so tender that they won't hold the stitches," she answered.

Mrs. Argyle laid down her own work.

"Let me see. Did you ever try to mend gloves with a buttonhole stitch?" she asked, with the practicality which years of riches had been powerless to blunt. "They hold better so. Let me try."

Janet shook her head.

"Really, they are so awful that I hate to have you see them," she protested.

Mrs. Argyle laughed.

"When I was your age, Janet, I wore shabbier

gloves than you ever dreamed of having," she answered.

"You could n't. They would n't have held together," Janet said flatly. Nevertheless, she put an aged ruin into Mrs. Argyle's outstretched hand. "Mrs. Argyle," she added desperately; "I do hate to be shabby. I am willing to wear plain things; but I do want them whole."

From the other side of the room, Day laughed a little unfeelingly.

"When the worst really comes, Janet, I advise you to economize on your stockings," she suggested.

Janet thrust out one slim ankle and surveyed it with swift disdain.

"But I can't," she said. "These are the cheapest that are made, the cheapest that are worth the darning."

"Cheap!" Day's voice was expressive. "I never wear such stockings."

"No," Janet said composedly; "I suppose you don't."

"Then I don't see why you should plead poverty," Day said again. "We are n't poor, and I adore pretty stockings; but I can't afford any such embroidery as that."

Once more Janet thrust out her slim, violet-sprinkled ankle. Then she laughed.

"Oh, is that what you are driving at?" she asked. "I could n't think what you meant. These are just common stockings. I embroidered them, myself."

"Janet Leslie!" Day was down on the floor, pulling aside Janet's skirt.

Janet laughed again in girlish pleasure. After all her shabbiness, it was good to find that, in some one item, her dress could arouse the admiration of a girl like Day.

"You think they are pretty?" she questioned.

"Pretty! They are adorable. Who taught you to do such work?"

"The nuns."

Day clasped her hands.

"Janet! Do you suppose they ever could teach me?"

"If you worked long enough."

"How long?"

"This is my first year out of the convent. I went in when I was seven."

Day counted swiftly.

"You are fourteen. Seven years." Then her tone lost its alertness. "And we are going home in about three weeks. Oh, dear!"

"I'll do some for you," Janet volunteered. "I love to do them."

"Come here, Janet," Mrs. Argyle bade her.

"Put up your foot, child, and let me see them. Where do you get your patterns?"

"Why, I make them up," Janet answered, in obvious surprise at such a question.

Mrs. Argyle lifted the black skirt, drew her fingers slowly across the firm, smooth stitches, let the skirt fall again, and looked up at Janet.

"Janet," she said quietly; "I shall be glad to furnish the stockings and pay you a dollar a pair for doing a dozen pairs for me."

"But, Mrs. Argyle!" Janet, scarlet now, had dropped on the floor at Mrs. Argyle's feet and was facing her with blazing eyes. "After all you have done for me, do you suppose I would n't love to do you all you want?"

Reaching out her hand, Mrs. Argyle took hold of the resolute little chin and turned the face upward.

"Janet, dear, you 'd sew your fingers off for me, if it were necessary; but fortunately it is n't. No; listen, dear. Your stockings are beautiful, much prettier than those I have seen in the shops. It will be doing me a great favour, if you will embroider some for Day and me."

"And give them to you," Janet begged.

"No, dear. You 'll give the design, the originality of them; but I shall pay for the work."

"But not four times what it is worth," Janet persisted.

Mrs. Argyle laughed.

"I'm not, Janet. In fact, I have paid more, ever so much more for work not half so good. If you only had the time, child, I could get orders for you in New York for all the stockings you could do."

Janet caught her breath.

"Really, Mrs. Argyle? Truthfully?"

"True as anything can be."

"But I can do them so fast. I could do ever so many in a week," she said, with breathless haste for, all at once, there had flashed up within her a sudden hope which, she had confessed to Rob, she had supposed forever dead.

"Why don't you go into business, Janet?" Day suggested practically. "There's one woman in New York who supports herself just by tying pretty bows, and another who has a great reputation, making scalloped cakes for children's parties. The first thing we always used to ask was whether there would be Severs cakes. Why don't you go in for stockings, and make yourself a name and fortune?"

And Janet answered slowly,—

"Do you know, Day, I really believe I will. That is," she looked up at Mrs. Argyle with eyes where courage and hope and appealing wishfulness were mingled; "that is, if your mother will help me start."

"Start what?" Rob demanded, as he appeared upon the threshold, with his father at his side.

It was Day who answered, for Janet coloured and fell silent. Her new-born plan as yet seemed to her too feeble to be displayed to other eyes than those of Day and Mrs. Argyle. Moreover, she was never quite at ease with Mr. Argyle whose brisk alertness and decision always made Janet think of one of the locomotives on the railway of which he was president. She admired him unreservedly; but she wondered without cease how Rob could be such chums with a man whom she so dreaded.

"Janet has unfolded her napkin and found her talent," Day said, as she made room for her father by her side. "She is going to win renown on her embroidered stockings."

Rob strode across the floor and sat himself down on the arm of his mother's chair.

"To quote the language of Sir George, how rummy!" he observed. "Janet, I bespeak your services for me and Dad. I'll have a football on mine, one leg, that is, and a pair of goal posts on the other. Then they can chase each other when I walk. As for Dad, he'll have a train of choo-choo cars around each ankle, just above his ties."

And, in the protesting groans that followed, Janet gathered up her work and prepared to make her escape. She met Ronald, however, upon the

threshold, and Ronald faced her about into the room once more.

"Come with me, while I break my news," he bade her, for it had been agreed, three days before, that nothing should be said to the Argyles regarding Sir George's offer, until some decision had been reached.

Day heard him, and she pricked up her ears.

"What news, Ronald?" she demanded promptly.

Laughing, he faced her, with a swift aside, —

"I have my mount. Are you glad?"

If he had expected that she would need explanation of his words, he was mistaken. She nodded back at him eagerly.

"I told you it would come, before I went away."

"And you also told me — "

She caught the words from his lips.

"Told you truly that none of your friends would be gladder than I."

His colour came. Day's friendship had grown very dear to him, during those winter weeks.

"It is true, then?" he asked, while he looked steadily down into her eyes.

Rising, she took his hand.

"Yes, Ronald, it is," she said simply. "You ought to know it by now."

From the other side of the room, Rob struck in resignedly.

"When you two have finished your minuet over there, I should like to remind Ronald that we are panting to hear his news."

Ronald laughed, as he faced about.

"I beg your pardon, everybody," he replied. "My news is a bit startling, too. I am to sail for England, two weeks from Saturday."

"Ronald!" Then Day checked herself abruptly, while Janet wondered at her changing colour.

"Wish I were!" Rob commented promptly. "There's a hint for you, Dad. What takes you, Ronald?"

"Sir George. I'm to go as his secretary."

"Ronald, you lucky man! Barring the slight lack of brains, Sir George will be one of the coming men. His uncle was endlessly rich and all that. When did this thing materialize?"

"Last night at eight o'clock," Janet answered for her brother. "I really settled it, the night before; but we only announced it to Sir George, last night."

"We!" Rob made a gesture of scorn at Janet.

"Yes, we," she answered firmly. "Ronald was bound he would n't leave us and go; and I did n't dare trust him to see Sir George alone, so I went, too, and helped him to break the news."

Rob turned from Janet back to Janet's brother.

"I'm no good at words, old man," he said, as

his hand shut hard on Ronald's fingers. "You know how glad I am. That office was wearing the life out of you. You took it like a trump; but you never could have held out long. You are n't built for things like that. You 're going in for a much better time, and I 'm mighty glad you are."

And Day added softly, —

"Yes. It was *Kismet*, after all."

"And yet," Rob said to his father, half an hour later; "I can't say I envy the fellow. He is in for easy work and a large salary; but there are other things to be considered. With a hand-organ to grind, his outfit would be complete; but mercifully Ronald Leslie's sense of humour is n't too acute."

The chorus of question and congratulation was ended, and Janet had swept Mrs. Argyle and Day off in search of her mother. Rob and his father were sitting alone before the fire.

Mr. Argyle looked up at his son's words, laughed a little, then grew grave once more.

"No," he said; "it is n't what I should have chosen; but I 'm not sure it 's not the best thing for Ronald. It may in time lead to something more important. Still — "

"Still?" Rob jogged his father, after it seemed to him the pause had lasted altogether too long.

"Still, I confess I am rather sorry."

"Why?"

"Because I have been keeping an eye on the fellow, myself."

"And somebody else came in ahead on the deal?" Rob inquired irreverently. "Too bad, Dad! Next time you'd better go about it a little earlier. What were you after?"

Mr. Argyle thoughtfully clasped his hands, then opened out the two forefingers and looked at them intently.

"I had been watching Leslie for weeks," he said again, and it was plain from his voice that he was disappointed. "I want just such a man as he is, young, steady, willing to work at whatever comes. Leslie was just the one. In time, he would have made his way to the front."

Rob faced his father steadily.

"I see," he said. "You wanted a man you could train for some especial thing."

"Yes."

"For what?"

"For manager up here. We have put through our deal; it won't be long before we need a manager for these Canadian lines, and that manager by rights ought to be —"

"A Canadian." Rob capped his sentence for him.

"Yes. I think he would get on better with the people up here."

Rob laughed, as there suddenly flashed into his mind the memory of one snowy day in the library.

"Yes," he echoed. "I think he would." Then once more he faced his father gravely. "Well," he demanded; "now you've lost your chance at Ronald, what are you going to do next?"

For an instant, his father's eyes rested upon him with manifest pride.

"Wait for you," he said then.

Rob shook his head.

"I'm no good, Dad; I'm not steady enough. Besides, you've always said I must go through college. That makes six years to wait."

"And I want the man, next month," Mr. Argyle made thoughtful answer. "I want him in my office, Rob; I want him to be trained from the first, trained under my own eye."

Rob nodded.

"I know. Just as grandfather trained you; just as you'll train me, Dad, once I am out of college." For a moment, he was silent, while he bent forward and prodded the fire. Then of a sudden he sat up and looked at his father, his lips unsteady with his eagerness, his blue eyes blazing. "Dad," he said, and, as he spoke, he gripped his courage fast; "I think — You want a fellow, as I understand it, a Canadian fellow who is steady and

loyal and willing to work at whatever comes, a fellow that 's all-round a man ?"

His father nodded, too intent upon his son's face to feel the need for words.

"Then," Rob spoke more slowly, and, while he spoke, he rose and faced his father steadily ; "then, Dad, I think I know the man you want."

It was nearly half an hour later that Day's voice was heard in the hall outside. Rising, Mr. Argyle put an end to the long talk.

"I like what you tell me, Rob," he said then. "I will make a few inquiries about the fellow, and see what I can find out."

Four days later, Rob crossed to Levis. The noon sun lay warm upon the river which glittered back again in every shade of blue and gray. Here and there a bit of ice, broken from the bridge which still held firm at Cap Rouge, came sliding down the tide ; but, for the most part, the river was wholly clear. The wind swept sharply down the stream ; yet Rob, his collar turned high about his ears, lingered in the bow, looking out upon the river, while his mind went back to his last crossing. Even now he could hear the hoarse cries from the pilot-house, could hear the angry grinding of the ice, could feel the steady, steely grip of Blanchard's hand upon his arm. Rob shut his teeth and stared out across the gleaming river which all at once seemed dan-

cing in a mist before his eyes. Two steady eyes seemed meeting his; and, above the noise of the ice, the echo of his own voice was in his ears, —

"We 'll fight it out together till the end."

From close at hand behind the corner of the foundry wall, there came a resounding whistle, just as Rob stepped upon the pier. The next instant, the long brown train swept in and halted, puffing, beside the crowded platform. Regardless of past strains and aches, Rob made after it, caught it up and came to a halt beside the steps of the Springfield sleeper. The porter saw him first and grinned a welcome; but Rob, for once, ignored a greeting. His eyes were all for a pair of wide, blue-coated shoulders, for a pair of keen brown eyes that could be gentle as well as piercing.

"Argyle! Where did you come from?"

Rob whirled about, held out his hand.

"Jack," he said simply; "I 've come for you. My father is waiting to see you in Quebec."

And, a little later, they went away together.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

"JANET," Mrs. Argyle said, a few days later; "I have decided that I want to borrow you for a month."

Janet looked up from the handkerchiefs she was marking with an R. L. and many tears.

"Borrow me?"

"Yes." Mrs. Argyle smiled at the absolute wonderment in the girl's tone. "May I?"

"Of course. Anything I have," Janet assented readily, for Mrs. Argyle was not only herself, but she was also Rob's mother and, to Janet, that was coming to count for a good deal.

"I want just you, yourself, dear."

"What for?"

"To take you home with me to spend a month."

"Oh, Mrs. Argyle!" For a moment, Janet held her breath, speechless. "Spend a month, a whole great, long month in New York, with you and Day and Rob! How I wish, wish, wish I could!"

"Why can't you?" Mrs. Argyle asked lightly, for, only the night before, she had had a long talk with Mrs. Leslie.

But already Janet's shoulders had fallen together, with her ebbing breath.

"I just can't," she said flatly.

"Why not?"

"I can't leave my mother."

"Not if she is willing?"

"She won't be."

"But she is. I asked her, first."

For an instant, the light blazed up again in Janet's eyes. Then the light was quenched.

"Mrs. Argyle," she said steadily; "her saying she is willing does n't make a bit of difference. I know, 'way down inside herself, she 'd hate to have me go."

"No, dear; I think she really is quite willing," Mrs. Argyle urged. "We talked it all over together: how you had never had a real journey, how much new there would be for you to see and learn, how much good it would do you."

Janet lifted her head proudly.

"Yes," she said; "and did you talk over what my mother would do without me?"

"Mrs. Waters is coming here to board, you know, as soon as she can have my room," Mrs. Argyle reminded her.

But Janet interrupted her impatiently.

"Yes, and would Mrs. Waters cuddle her, and talk to her in the twilight, when she gets lonesome

waiting for Ronald to come in to supper? And would Mrs. Waters talk over Ronald's letters with her, and plan what we 'd write back again?"

"But only for a month, Janet. And we all want you so. Rob and I planned it together, and Day is as eager for it as we are. Rob is writing to Sidney about it now. And a month is such a little bit of a time."

However, Janet's head had drooped again; the fire had left her eager young voice, and now the words dragged a little.

"Mrs. Argyle," she said slowly; "it is lovely of you to ask me, lovelier still of you to want me. I only wish I could go; it would be just like going into heaven, the journey, and the visit, and the seeing New York and all the rest of it. If I were a little bit of a girl, I should just sit down and cry for it all; but, even then, I am not sure I should go."

"But I can't see why you should n't." Mrs. Argyle spoke thoughtfully, her eyes on Janet's face, while her thoughts went over and over her talk with Mrs. Leslie. "I truly think your mother believes it would be the best thing in the world for you."

Again Janet raised her head.

"Best for me, of course; but what about its being best for her?" she asked stubbornly. Then

once more her tone changed. "Mrs. Argyle, please don't think I don't want to go," she begged; "please don't think I don't appreciate your asking me. I love it all, love it ever so much more than you will ever know. But — I promised Ronald I would take care of mother."

"I know, dear child; but — "

Janet shook her head.

"I should n't be keeping my promise, if I went off to have a good time, just as soon as Ronald's back was turned. Mrs. Argyle, when I was a little, little mussy baby, my mother had to give up things and stay at home with me. It 's my turn, now; and I ought to be glad to do it." She looked up bravely; then the bravery ended in a sudden wave of girlish disappointment. "But I 'm not glad a bit. I want to go, want it more than I ever wanted anything else in all my life."

And Mrs. Argyle answered slowly, while she patted the brown head which all at once had come against her shoulder, —

"Janet dear, I wish you could. And yet, I think perhaps you are right."

Once more Janet raised her head and spoke rapidly.

"It is right, I know. I wish it were n't; but it 's no use. I should n't be happy for one single moment. All the time I was doing things and

seeing things, I should keep thinking of my mother here alone, with my father dead, and Ronald away, and me running off to leave her as soon as ever I could. You know how I'd love it, if things were only different. Day is a dear, and, next to Ronald, I like Rob best of all the boys I've ever known. And I never went on a journey over night, nor saw the United States. It is going to be so lonesome, too, with Ronald gone and you all going." Suddenly she lifted her head, which had fallen back into its old place. "Mrs. Argyle," she asked, and her voice was sharp with anxiety; "does Ronald know?"

"I'm not sure, dear. I think not, though. He was at the Château with Sir George, all last night."

"He must n't be told at all," Janet said resolutely, as she rose from the arm of Mrs. Argyle's chair and crossed the room to the window.

"But why?"

For a long moment, Janet's gaze rested on a knot of soldiers coming down from the Citadel. The sunlight, striking on their scarlet coats, brought them out in bold relief against the gray old wall beyond. The vivid bit of colour, their laughing faces and their swift, alert tread, all seemed to throw into stronger contrast the shadow of disappointment which lay upon the girl within.

Then, facing about, she answered Mrs. Argyle's question with a voice she strove in vain to keep level.

"Because it would tangle all his plans and make him worry. He was determined he'd not go, Mrs. Argyle; he was going to give it up, all the money and the fun and all, for mother and for me. He only said he'd go, when I promised I would see to mother and keep her from missing him too much. Mrs. Argyle," her voice grew firm once more; "I love you all; you know I do, even if I have had queer ways of showing it sometimes. But my mother and Ronald stand first. They would give up anything in this world for me. It would be a shame to me, if I would n't give up this one thing for them."

And Mrs. Argyle, watching the sad, resolute young face, told herself that Janet was right.

Nevertheless, there was mourning and lamentation among the younger Argyles, when Janet's decision was made known; and only Janet's eager pleading held Day back from making a final appeal to Ronald. Quite unexpectedly, however, Mr. Argyle took his stand upon the side of Janet.

"I like your pluck, my dear," he said to her, one night. "I think you are in the right of it; it 's no time to leave your mother, when she 's in her first woe over Ronald's going. Wait a few months, and

then we 'll have a visit from you both. Just now, your place is here."

And, meanwhile, the hours were ebbing fast, and the day was at hand when Sir George Porteous was to sail for home and take Ronald Leslie with him. It was an early spring, that year. Already the ice had left the river below Quebec; already the ocean liners were coming in and out. Sir George had been waiting for the opening of the river; his one experience of American railways had led him to shun the journey to Halifax by rail. Rather than that, he would have delayed until the end of summer the returning to his home and his new duties. In fact, now that Sir George had arrayed himself in mourning garments and taken to himself a secretary, he appeared to feel that his whole duty was done; and it was only in response to a vigorous prodding from his lawyers in England that he had aroused himself to the point of booking his passage home. At length, however, the final morning came, and Sir George, hat in hand, sat on his bed and languidly surveyed his heap of luggage.

"Oh, I say, you've been very good to me," he observed to Mrs. Leslie, as she straightened up her bent and aching back. "A fellow has so many things, you know. If it had n't been for you and Leslie, they 'd have been in shocking heaps."

Sir George spoke truthfully. He had spent all

of Thursday and most of Friday morning in alternately putting up his glass to stare at his possessions, then in resting his head against the back of his chair and closing his puzzled eyes. On Wednesday night, Sir George had gone so far as to order his various boxes and bags brought to his room. When he went up from dinner, they stood awaiting him in serried rank.

"By George!" Sir George remarked to himself, as he beheld them. "I 'd best begin my packing."

For the next half-hour, he worked diligently, so diligently that his bureau drawers and his two wardrobes yawned at him emptily, their former contents strewn on couch and table and across the open trunks. Then Sir George turned weary, and betook himself to bed. Once after that, he went so far as to gather up his neckties and hang them, sorted by colours, across the footboard of his bed. Otherwise, nothing had been moved when, late on Friday morning, Ronald had come into the room. Two hours later, Mrs. Leslie was assisting her son to pack the raiment of Sir George Porteous.

The steamer was to sail, early that Saturday afternoon; and the noonday sun was still warm over the city when two carriages drove away from the door of the Leslie home. The first one held the four Argyles, for Mrs. Argyle had realized that no alien eyes should look on Ronald's parting from

the old home where all his childhood had been spent. Accordingly, they had hurried through the mid-day dinner, and taken a long drive out the Sainte Foy Road before they turned and went down Palace Hill. The streets of Lower Town were deep in mud, as the horses plashed their way eastward and came out upon the pier, where the great steamer was puffing lazily and straining at her moorings with the ebbing of the tide.

Sir George Porteous was there before them, three brown-clad porters by his side, while the inspector toiled his weary way through the vast pile of luggage. All at once, Sir George lifted his voice in shrill remonstrance.

"Oh, I say, be careful; can't you? All my trousers are in there, you know. Don't root about like that!" Then, turning, he saw Day and rose to his feet. "I thought you'd come," he said. "It 's like the old times, you know, when you always used to be about. I 'll miss you, when I get to England. You 're not like our girls, you know."

Then, with a cursory nod at Rob, he turned once more and grasped Mrs. Argyle's hands.

"You 've been so good to me," he said simply. "A fellow does get lonely, and you 've tried to put it right."

But Day had whirled about, for Ronald's voice

was in her ears; and, all at once, it seemed to her that the great black steamer, puffing and straining at her moorings, had blotted out for her the sky and sun.

"Ronald," she said bravely, though with a queer little catch in her voice; "I told you I 'd be glad, gladder than any of your other friends. I am glad, too, only —"

And Ronald understood.

Then the moments dragged on slowly, with forced talk and frequent pauses, till at last the signal came and the many groups parted into two, one for the sea and one for shore. The last rope plashed overboard, the great vessel shivered, moved, and there came a narrow thread of open water between the shipside and the pier. Then, for an instant, Mrs. Leslie hid her face; but Janet, scarlet, dry-eyed, waved a brave farewell.

Far towards the stern, Sir George and Ronald leaned upon the rail. Ronald's eyes were eagerly racing to and fro across the little group of familiar faces; but Sir George, his jaw sagging and his eyeglass in his hand, surveyed them with a calm regret. Suddenly Day, standing on the very edge of the pier, lifted her hand for silence. Clear and distinct across the water, in all its languid cadence there floated back to them the voice of Sir George Porteous.

"Oh, I say," he was observing mournfully; "really, it's a brute of a thing to bid your friends good-by."

As the group on shore turned back to the waiting carriages, Rob stepped to his father's side.

"Take Mrs. Leslie in my place," he said. "Janet and I will walk up together."

Nevertheless, before they did walk up together, they lingered long upon the pier. Slowly the crowd about them dwindled away, until the place was wellnigh deserted. Slowly the sun dropped behind the gray old city on the cliff. Slowly the Levis heights across the river dyed themselves with the rosy purple which heralds the sunset gold to come. Down and away from before their feet, the great river flowed on in silent majesty, bearing the steamer from their sight. Already she was dwindling to a toy-like shape, far down the southern channel. Janet stared after it with dreary eyes. The scarlet had left her cheeks, her lashes drooped heavily and her chin had lost its resolution. For the hour, her bright courage had left her; and it was a piteous face which she turned to Rob, in answer to his touch upon her arm.

"Just let me make my wail," she begged him, humbly as a little child might have done. "Mummy must n't see me cry; I promised Ronald I 'd be

brave. But — " with a swift, tragical gesture at the banner of smoke which hung in the sky above a far-off point of land, she added ; " but that steamer is carrying off my Ronald, and I just can't live without him."

Furtively Rob rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes ; still more furtively he rubbed the back of his hand across the side of his coat.

" Don't mind, Janet," he said then. " You 'll feel better, when you 've cried it out."

But she shook her head.

" Crying never helps ; it only gives one headache and a swollen nose," she said, with brave practicality. " Talk to me, Rob, and make me forget things."

And, with Rob's assenting gesture, they turned away, came off from the pier and followed the muddy pavements back to Dambourges Hill. At the top of the hill, Rob halted irresolutely ; then he led the way out to the edge of the bastion. For a long moment, they stood there silent, leaning on the rail and staring out across the flats at the distant ring of dark blue mountains which shuts in the changing picture in its mighty, changeless frame. Then slowly, gravely Rob turned about and laid his hand on Janet's which rested, tightly shut, upon the black muzzle of one of the ancient guns.

"Janet," he said; "I 'm going away, next week. I hope you 're sorry."

Instantly her face changed. In her sorrow for Ronald, she had forgotten this other parting, now so near at hand.

"I am," she said; but the words were scarcely audible.

"We 've had some good times together," Rob went on; "likewise some rows." He smiled a little, as he spoke. Then he added, "But, after all, I think we 're the best kind of friends. It has been fun, our being here; some day, we 'll all get together again. I 'm sorry you can't come home with us; but I honestly do agree with Dad: your place is here."

He had been speaking with slow thoughtfulness, and now he allowed the silence to drop over his last words, while his blue eyes fell from Janet to the river at his feet. Then suddenly he turned back to face her, and gave her hand a steady, hearty grip.

"Janet," he said; "you 're a good little soul, and a plucky. I 'm glad I 've known you, and I 'm sure we 'll keep on being friends."

And, hand in hand, they faced about and vanished around the angle of the Ramparts.

THE END.

THE BEST
BOOKS
COMPANIONS

Miss Ray's New Story for Girls

SIDNEY: HER SUMMER ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

By ANNA CHAPIN RAY

Author of the "Teddy" books, "Janet: Her Winter at Quebec," etc.

Illustrated by Alice Barber Stephens. 12mo. Decorated Cloth. $1.50

Sidney Straves is another of this author's true, helpful, earnest girl characters. — *Denver Republican.*

The young heroine is a forceful little maiden of sweet sixteen. The descriptions of picnics in the pretty Canadian country are very gay and enticing, and Sidney and her friends are a merry group of wholesome young people. — *The Churchman*, New York.

Sidney is a very happy, wholesome girl with a bit of a temper to make her human. — *New York Sun.*

A book with lots of common sense and thought, but not a bit "preachy." The characters are frank, open, and sensible, and the author knows girls and boys and has real sympathy with them. — *Boston Journal.*

Her books are always natural and sane, with plenty of action, humor, and sentiment of the right kind. — *Providence Journal.*

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., PUBLISHERS
254 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON

ANNA CHAPIN RAY'S
"TEDDY" STORIES

Miss Ray's work draws instant comparison with the best of Miss Alcott's: first, because she has the same genuine sympathy with boy and girl life; secondly, because she creates real characters, individual and natural, like the young people one knows, actually working out the same kind of problems; and, finally, because her style of writing is equally unaffected and straightforward.—*Christian Register*, Boston.

TEDDY: HER BOOK. A Story of Sweet Sixteen

Illustrated by Vesper L. George. 12mo. $1.50.

This bewitching story of "Sweet Sixteen," with its earnestness, impetuosity, merry pranks, and unconscious love for her hero, has the same spring-like charm.—*Kate Sanborn.*

PHEBE: HER PROFESSION. A Sequel to "Teddy: Her Book"

Illustrated by Frank T. Merrill. 12mo. $1.50.

This is one of the few books written for young people in which there is to be found the same vigor and grace that one demands in a good story for older people. —*Worcester Spy.*

TEDDY: HER DAUGHTER

A Sequel to "Teddy: Her Book," and "Phebe: Her Profession"

Illustrated by J. B. Graff. 12mo. $1.50.

It is a human story, all the characters breathing life and activity.—*Buffalo Times.*

NATHALIE'S CHUM

Illustrated by Ellen Bernard Thompson. 12mo. $1.50.

Nathalie is the sort of a young girl whom other girls like to read about.—*Hartford Courant.*

URSULA'S FRESHMAN. A Sequel to "Nathalie's Chum"

Illustrated by Harriet Roosevelt Richards. 12mo. $1.50.

The best of a series already the best of its kind. — *Boston Herald.*

NATHALIE'S SISTER. A Sequel to "Ursula's Freshman"

Illustrated by Alice Barber Stephens. 12mo. $1.50.

Peggy, the heroine, is a most original little lady who says and does all sorts of interesting things. She has pluck and spirit, and a temper, but she is very lovable, and girls will find her delightful to read about.—*Louisville Evening Post.*

LITTLE, BROWN, & COMPANY, *Publishers*
254 WASHINGTON ST., BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

HELEN LEAH REED'S "BRENDA" BOOKS

BRENDA, HER SCHOOL AND HER CLUB

Illustrated by Jessie Willcox Smith. 12mo. $1.50.

The Boston Herald says: "Miss Reed's girls have all the impulses and likes of real girls as their characters are developing, and her record of their thoughts and actions reads like a chapter snatched from the page of life. It is bright, genial, merry, wholesome, and full of good characterizations."

BRENDA'S SUMMER AT ROCKLEY

Illustrated by Jessie Willcox Smith. 12mo. $1.50.

A charming picture of vacation life along the famous North Shore of Massachusetts.

The *Outlook* says: "The author is one of the best equipped of our writers for girls of larger growth. Her stories are strong, intelligent, and wholesome."

BRENDA'S COUSIN AT RADCLIFFE

Illustrated by Alice Barber Stephens. 12mo. $1.50.

A remarkably real and fascinating story of a college girl's career, excelling in interest Miss Reed's first "Brenda" book. The *Providence News* says of it: "No better college story has been written." The author is a graduate of Radcliffe College which she describes.

BRENDA'S BARGAIN

Illustrated. 12mo. $1.50.

"The fourth and last of the 'Brenda' books," says *The Bookman*, "deals with social settlement work, under conditions with which the author is familiar." The *Boston Transcript* adds: "This book is by far the best of the series."

LITTLE, BROWN, & COMPANY, *Publishers*
254 WASHINGTON ST., BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

New Illustrated Editions of Miss Alcott's Famous Stories

THE LITTLE WOMEN SERIES

By Louisa M. Alcott. Illustrated Edition. With eighty-four full-page plates from drawings especially made for this edition by Reginald B. Birch, Alice Barber Stephens, Jessie Willcox Smith, and Harriet Roosevelt Richards. 8 vols. Crown 8vo. Decorated cloth, gilt, in box, $16.00.

Separately as follows:

1. **LITTLE MEN: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys**
With 15 full-page illustrations by Reginald B. Birch. $2.00.

2. **LITTLE WOMEN: or Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy**
With 15 full-page illustrations by Alice Barber Stephens. $2.00.

3. **AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL**
With 12 full-page pictures by Jessie Willcox Smith. $2.00.

4. **JO'S BOYS, and How They Turned Out**
A Sequel to "Little Men." With 10 full-page plates by Ellen Wetherald Ahrens. $2.00.

5. **EIGHT COUSINS; or, the Aunt-Hill**
With 8 full-page pictures by Harriet Roosevelt Richards.

6. **ROSE IN BLOOM**
A Sequel to "Eight Cousins." With 8 full-page pictures by Harriet Roosevelt Richards. $2.00.

7. **UNDER THE LILACS**
With 8 original full-page pictures by Alice Barber Stephens. $2.00.

8. **JACK AND JILL**
With 8 full-page pictures from drawings by Harriet Roosevelt Richards. $2.00.

The artists selected to illustrate have caught the spirit of the originals and contributed a series of strikingly beautiful and faithful pictures of the author's characters and scenes. — *Boston Herald.*

Alice Barber Stephens, who is very near the head of American illustrators, has shown wonderful ability in delineating the characters and costumes for "Little Women." They are almost startlingly realistic. — *Worcester Spy.*

Miss Alcott's books have never before had such an attractive typographical dress as the present. They are printed in large type on heavy paper, artistically bound, and illustrated with many full-page drawings. — *Philadelphia Press.*

LITTLE, BROWN, & COMPANY

Publishers, 254 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON, MASS.